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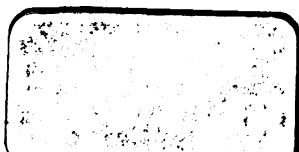
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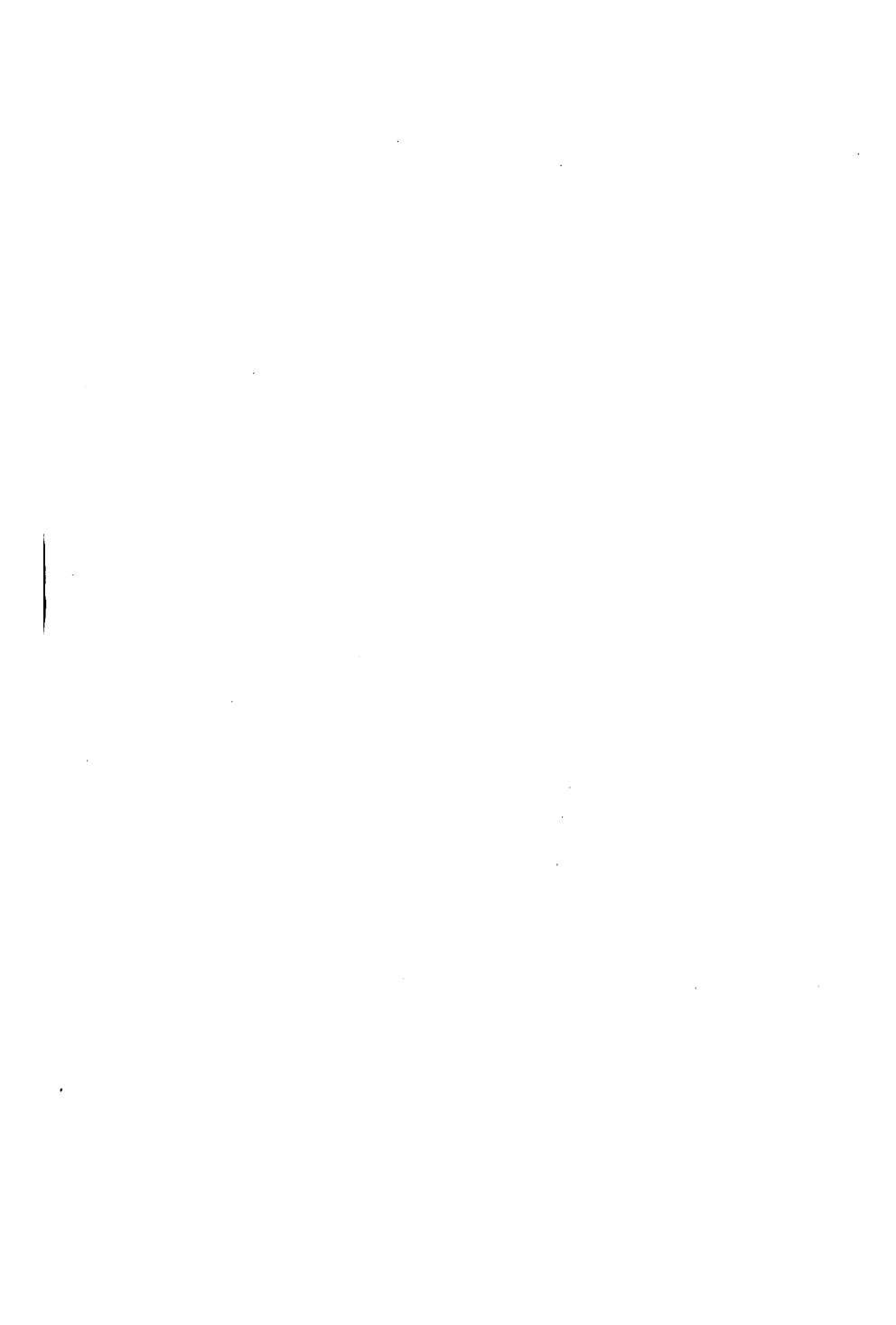
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THE  
BOND OF HONOUR.

A Heart-History.

“Gefühl ist alles.”—FAUST.

IN THREE VOLUMES.  
VOL. III.



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# THE BOND OF HONOUR.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE REST OF THE NIGHT.

**J**USTINE was asleep, locked in the sound slumber that supervenes upon hard, manual labour, when she was summoned to take her turn in watching her mistress. As for the moment Louise stood by her bedside, and regarded the rough, honest features of the old servant, and noted the expression of placid repose which they bore—the sure evidence of an untroubled conscience within—she felt like the serpent watching Eve in Paradise. The contrast between herself and the slumbering woman was too torturing to be dwelt upon. With a fierce, convulsive grip

she seized Justine by the shoulder. The latter started up in affright.

"*Gott!* Fräulein, how you frightened me!"

"I promised to call you at eleven, you know."

"And is it eleven already?" asked the sleepy servant, sitting up in bed and rubbing her eyes.

"Very nearly—it only wants about ten minutes."

"I'll be ready by that time," said Justine.

"Have you given the mistress her medicine?"

Louise shuddered.

"Yes;" she said at last with a violent effort.

Justine had now succeeded in opening her eyes thoroughly, and was at once struck by the peculiar expression of her visitor's face.

"*Gerechter Himmel!* Fräulein, how odd you look!"

Louise felt that it was true. How should she look otherwise than odd, with this great crime gnawing at her heart?

"I daresay I do," she answered in a cavernous whisper. "I have not been well all day, and I want some sleep sadly. I suppose you will be ready soon?"

"Directly, Fräulein. Pray go to bed at once, don't wait a moment. I shall be upstairs in five minutes."

But Louise did not seem anxious to go. Was it that she was afraid of meeting some shape of horror, or hearing some sound of dread on her solitary way to her own chamber? At any rate she remained where she was.

"I will stay here," she said, "until you are ready. I should like to know that you are actually with my aunt before I go to sleep."

Justine stared, but said nothing. In a few minutes she was dressed sufficiently to go upstairs. The two went together, Justine first, and then Louise—looking every now and then fearfully back over her shoulder, and yet more fearfully in front.

They came to Frau Schönbrunn's room. Louise would not go in, but wishing Justine a hoarse, whispered "Good-night," turned aside into her own.

Arrived there, she locked instinctively the door, as if by this material obstacle she would shut out the ghastly consequences of her

crime. Then she placed her candle on the mantle-shelf and began to think.

And yet, though her mind was preternaturally active, it was hard to marshal her thoughts with any precision. It seemed as though the once Debateable Land of her soul were now the acknowledged domain of a troop of torturing demons. 'Confused, spectral images, all dark, horrible, revolting, sported loathsomely thereon. Do what she might, she could not cast them forth, she could not calm herself sufficiently to shape her plans for the future. Her sense of guilt was beginning to tell upon her terribly.

Strangely too did the mind act upon the body, and that again re-act upon the mind. She felt cold and weary. The dim, uncertain light of the solitary candle tortured her with its fitfulness and faintness. It seemed to help her imagination to conjure up dark, fearful figures before her eyes—to aid her in that awful process of transmutation by which remorse changes everything around it into some shape of dread.

She was weary, but she could not sleep. There was still a burning excitement, along

with a bitter agony, at her heart. The last scene of all was not yet over. When would it take place, and how? Would her aunt pass away quietly and placidly in sleep, or would it be in throes and terrible convulsions? She knew not. She could only wait and watch in fearful suspense and life-benumbing horror.

How long she thus sate, motionless, with face buried for the most part in her hands, she knew not. To her it seemed an eternity. It was one of those supreme epochs, whether of joy or woe, in which a man's life seems gathered into a burning focus—in which, in virtue of a superhuman intensity of feeling, he becomes for the while as a deity either of good or ill—as one to whom the accidents of time are nothing, the essentials of existence everything.

Suddenly there rang out, shrill and piercing, from the neighbouring room, a cry of anguish. Another and another followed. Then for a moment all was silence.

Louise sate still. Her heart leapt to her mouth. She could not move. An overpowering terror had fastened upon her frame. Only she bent down her head yet lower, and placed her fingers in her ears to shut out, if possible,

those hideous shrieks. Here was the last act in that awful tragedy—Life's curtain was about to fall behind a departing soul.

A thought flashed like vivid lightning through the girl's brain, and photographed in its passage a life-long impression thereon. It was, that in a few moments more her aunt would be in that region where all things are laid bare. She would then know who was her murderess. Death, which hides so much from men, reveals all to disembodied spirits. This was a thought which should prey like a cancer upon the peace of Louise till she herself were laid in the grave.

At the same moment that she thus thought, she became aware of a loud, frightened knocking at the door, and of a voice crying out in piteous, fearful accents :

"Help! Fräulein, help! The mistress is dying."

Should Louise move? Could she? She felt she must, and the supreme necessity brought with it the possibility. She unlocked the door. Without stood Justine, deadly pale, and with the impression of some recent horror stamped visibly upon her face.

“ Oh! Fräulein, Fräulein, come at once ! The mistress is dying, and dying so awfully too ! ”

So saying, she almost dragged Louise into her aunt's chamber. The latter could not resist. The necessity, which, as she thought, had forced her to the crime, now forced her to witness its consummation. She had sown the wind, must she not reap the whirlwind ?

But she had not expected so horrible a sight as that which now met her gaze. Her aunt was still alive. Her eyes were glaring, red, lurid, and terrible, like coals of fire. Such was their fearful energy of expression that it seemed as if her whole past life-time of thought were concentrated in them. The face was white as marble, but on it there stood great beaded drops of cold sweat, distilled by agony. But, most terrible of all, every feature was hideously distorted. It was impossible to recognize that this was the face of her aunt. The mouth was twisted to one side ; the lips, thin and bloodless, stood wide apart ; the teeth, firmly clenched, grinned forth from between them in ghastly mockery, whilst from their interstices there oozed out a dark, frothy ichor ; the nose was strangely drawn and sharpened ;

even the eyelids were unnaturally far asunder, so that the small glowing pupil was ringed horribly with yellowish white. All the upper part of her frame was similarly contorted—whether it were so with the lower, Louise could not see. The hands were so tightly clenched that the long nails must have been driven into the wasted palms. The tendons of the thin naked arm and of the meagre throat stood out hard and rigid as threads of iron, and, with a mortal shudder, Louise thought she remarked that even the ears were strangely drawn forward—pricked-up, as it were—by some unnatural tension of the muscles. It was, indeed, rather the face and form of a fiend than of a human being.

Unspeakably shocked and horrified, Louise stood for a moment before her victim. She could not draw her breath for terror at the sight. She had never expected things to end like this. All she had ever seen or read fell immeasurably short of this present horror. And she herself had caused it! Her aunt spoke not—could not speak—but those lurid eyes, fixed upon her, seemed to Louise to be burning into her soul the reproaches that the tongue could not utter.

There she stood as one spell-bound, pierced through and through and nailed to the floor by the sharp javelin of her guilt. She, too, could not articulate a word. Her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth. She could neither weep nor cry out. She could only stand there aghast, remorseful, dumb.

At last Justine broke the spell.

“What shall we do?” she cried, in a voice full of terror. “Will you watch her while I run for a doctor?”

“No! I will go,” said Louise, “I am dressed.” To be left alone in that awful hour with her victim was not to be endured. And, without waiting for Justine’s consent, she turned and fled from the room.

Hurriedly she put on her bonnet and shawl, and rushed out of the house. She fled, wicked as she was, as though one pursued her. The rapidity of the motion was grateful to her in her excited state. She had not very far to go. The doctor lived in the Domstrasse. She pulled the bell with frantic eagerness. It was told her that the doctor would be down directly, and she resolved to wait for him. She cared not to go back alone.

The doctor did not keep her waiting long. With professional quickness he hurried on his things, taking care meanwhile to disturb his wife as little as possible, and hastened downstairs. Louise forestalled his questions.

"Come at once," she said, "Herr Doctor, my aunt is much worse—dying, I fear."

The doctor looked infinitely surprised.

"I did not think she was so weak as all that," he said. "Her pulse was still pretty good this afternoon. But let us go at once."

With rapid steps they walked towards the house where the dying woman lay. The doctor was still musing on the suddenness of the attack.

"What makes you think your aunt is so much worse?" he asked at last. "Is she so very weak?"

"I don't know about that," answered Louise hurriedly. "But she cannot speak and she looks so awful."

"Strange!" murmured the doctor. "And why did you not send Justine for me, Fräulein? It is hardly safe for you to expose yourself to the night-air in this way."

"I was dressed and I thought I could get here quickest."

By this time they had reached the Ketten-gasse, and, in a minute more, were in the house. The doctor went upstairs, preceded by Louise, who, however, signed to him to enter the chamber of death before her. Peeping fearfully over his shoulder, she followed.

Frau Schönbrunn was still alive, but looked more ghastly than ever. The doctor approached her rapidly. In a moment his experienced eye detected the nature of the attack. He turned to Louise :

"Where is the medicine ?" he asked sternly.

Louise pointed, without speaking, to the mantle-piece. The doctor followed the direction of her finger. He strode with two steps to the spot. He seized the bottle. Only one dose had been taken.

Could he have made some mistake ? Hastily drawing the cork he moistened the tip of his finger with the contents of the phial. No ; it had the right taste, and, so far from being a stronger, was even a weaker preparation than he had intended. And yet the patient's symptoms were so unmistakable.

He could come to but one conclusion—Frau Schönbrunn must have a most remarkable idiosyncrasy of constitution to be affected so severely by such a dose. He inwardly cursed himself for prescribing the medicine. But who was to have foreseen such an unexpected result? In all his experience he had never known such a case.

Paler than his wont, the doctor turned again towards the patient. One careful glance showed him that all hope of saving her life was over. Her breathing was heavy and stertorous. The death-sweat stood on her brow. At intervals that strange, rattling sound was heard in her throat, which is so sure a precursor of dissolution. It seemed, too, as if the *rigor mortis* were already setting in, whilst a film was gathering over her eyes. The doctor saw he could do nothing. For the sake of appearances, however, he busied himself in some useless attempts at restoration.

Whilst thus occupied, he looked up once at Louise. He was struck by the awful expression of her face and the statue-like rigidity of her attitude. But he attributed it all to natural horror at the scene :

“It is useless for you to remain, Fräulein,” he said. “I will stay here till all is over.”

Mechanically Louise turned and left the room. Justine remained, weeping piteously. She was the only creature on earth who loved the dying woman, or who would feel her removal as a loss. And why she loved her, it would have been hard to say.

Louise went down-stairs, and remained in chill suspense in the little sitting-room. She had not long, however, to wait—though to her it seemed an age. In about half-an-hour the doctor came down very quietly and solemnly.

“Your poor aunt is no more,” he said gently.

Louise would have given worlds to weep, but it was impossible. The channel of her tears was dried up by the hot sun of her guilt. She could only bow her head, as if in resignation, and look whiter and more statue-like than ever. The news was almost a relief. Her crime was now an accomplished fact. There was nothing more for her to do, or for her victim to suffer.

“I own I am surprised at the suddenness

of this attack," continued the doctor ; " but in any case your aunt could not have lived much longer. This should be some slight consolation to you in your present state of grief. Allow me to say how much I feel for you."

Louise thanked the good-hearted man, and did so earnestly. She was really touched by the kindness he had always shown her. The doctor continued, after a pause :

" I will do all that is necessary in such cases. You need have no trouble or additional suffering in the matter. To-morrow, seals must be put upon everything in the house. As you were not present at the time of death, your evidence will not be wanted by the authorities. I and Justine will manage everything. I mention all this," he added, looking compassionately at the girl's white face, " because I think you ought to leave this house and go home as soon as possible. The sad event has evidently given you a great shock, and you were almost worn out before. If you will take my advice as a doctor, you will go home to-morrow, after waiting until everything has been sealed by the authori-

ties. No doubt Herr Bonngart will come directly he hears the news, and there is no object in your remaining."

Louise looked up at the doctor with inexpressible gratitude. Had he been her accomplice he could not have made her way plainer for her. It behoved her, however, to say something.

"Won't it look rather strange to go so soon?" she asked.

"Not at all—not at all," answered the good-natured doctor; "and, besides, if it does, I am to blame. I will take all the responsibility."

"Then I will follow your advice," said Louise.

"I will see that everything is arranged as early as possible to-morrow. Meanwhile try to get some sleep—you want it. By-the-way, do you dislike staying in the house here?—if so, come home with me. My wife can give you a bed. I have spoken to Justine. She doesn't mind being left."

This was an offer that Louise was only too glad to accept, and, though she did not sleep, she felt a kind of protection in being under

the doctor's roof. How she spent the rest of that awful night must be left to the imagination to picture. When she rose in the morning, though no gray hairs had intruded themselves amongst her luxuriant tresses, the girl looked ten years older than she had looked the morning of the day before. The face had acquired a sternness and rigidity which it never afterwards lost, and the eye had a kind of guilty, down-cast look, of which she was herself aware, but which she strove in vain to overcome. The ploughshare of crime had passed over her, and had left indelible traces even on her body.

The doctor kept his word, and managed everything the next day, with much tact and consideration. At the right time Louise returned with him to the house, and witnessed the placing of all Frau Schönbrunn's property under the formal protection of the law. Justine had already supplied the right official with the necessary facts respecting her mistress's birth, parentage, and so forth, and the doctor had testified to the cause of death. He had entered it as "exhaustion, supervening upon *paraplegia*." Of those strange

convulsions he had not thought it necessary to make mention. He could not accuse himself of want of professional caution in having prescribed the medicine he had—but still, were the fact known, other people might, not improbably, take a harsher view. And *cui bono*? It were surely best, then, to leave the matter in obscurity.

Nothing now remained for Louise to do but to pack up, and this, with the help of Justine, she soon accomplished. That faithful domestic, who had become much attached to her during their sojourn together, felt the approaching separation not a little.

“I have lost my good, kind mistress,” she sobbed, “and now I must lose you.”

“You will not lose me, Justine,” answered Louise. “I shall never forget all your kindness to me, and I will always do anything in my power to help you in any way. What do you think of doing?”

There was no difficulty about Justine’s future. In spite of her mistress’s penuriousness, the servant had managed to save a little money. Besides this, she had reason to expect that Frau Schönbrunn had left her a

small annuity. She had a brother, a *Pachter* or farmer, living near Nürnberg, to whom she meant to go, and she did not think she should take another place. It would be so difficult for her, she said, after having been so long with Frau Schönbrunn, to get into the ways of strange people.

They were still talking, when there came a ring at the door. It was the *droschky* to convey Louise to the station. The doctor was waiting below to see her into it. She shook hands warmly with Justine, and the colour was beginning to return to her cheek at the nearness of her emancipation from that house of horrors, when it was driven back again by Justine saying :

“Wouldn’t you like to see your aunt once more before you go ? She don’t look quite so awful, poor thing, now that her eyes is shut.”

At these words the dread picture of the last night’s death-bed came with a yet more ghastly vividness before the recollection of Louise. She gasped for breath.

“No ! no !” she groaned. “A thousand times, no ! Would that I could forget it for ever !” And brushing past the startled Jus-

tine, she rushed down stairs. The doctor was in the passage and saw her with much fatherly tenderness into her carriage. Good, innocent man, he compassionated her greatly, and to the day of his death would no doubt mention her as an unusually dutiful and affectionate niece. He never dreamt of crime lurking under that fair face and form.

At the station Louise despatched a telegram to her father, informing him of the death of her aunt, and of her own intention of returning immediately. She had delayed doing this till now lest he should telegraph back, bidding her remain where she was. If this were now done, she could say she had never received the message. And she knew that, even if not expected at the moment, she would yet be welcomed at home, when there was no longer any chance of Frau Schönbrunn's will being altered.

Luckily she had just enough money to take her ticket. The thoughtful doctor had not forgotten even this, and had placed his purse at her disposal; but it had not been necessary for Louise to avail herself of his kind offer.

As the train bore her rapidly along, and

removed her further and further from the scene of her guilt, Louise began to feel a little more composed. But she was by this time aware that thenceforward she would never know happiness again. She had staked her soul on a desperate cast, and it was now no longer hers. It was Satan's, to rifle and torment. Meanwhile, the object for which she had sinned had been attained. She had been set free to unravel the mystery that had driven her to this deed of darkness. What sort of discovery awaited her at home, she knew not—she could but dimly conjecture. Only she still clung with a weak, lingering hope to the idea that Arthur might yet prove true.

She was for the hundredth time repeating to herself this hope when the train arrived at Bonn. There was no one there to meet her. Could it be that her telegram had not arrived? She bade a porter convey her luggage to a carriage, and ordered the coachman to drive her to her address.

As they drove along the Coblenzerstrasse, there emerged from one of those lanes which lead thence to the Rhine a small group of

persons. They were laughing and talking merrily. Louise recognized them at once. In front were her mother, and Theodore, and Theresa, and another lady and gentleman—friends of the family. Some little way behind, apparently engaged in confidential intercourse, came Florence and Arthur. She was looking up into his face with an earnest, eager expression, whilst he seemed gazing upon her with eyes brimful of tender feeling. They were all too much occupied to look towards Louise, but the latter saw the driver of her carriage glance knowingly towards them, and heard him mutter to a companion on the box; whom he had brought with him to carry in the luggage of his fare—

“Look at the Englishman and the young American lady. They say they are engaged, and both are immensely rich.”

Louise sank back in her seat. It seemed indeed too true. Was it only for this, then, she had stained her soul with crime? No! If love should prove impossible, she would yet have the sweetness of revenge.

In another moment the group had descried her. Loud were their expressions of astonish-

ment. They came hastily towards her, whilst Louise bade the driver stop. All were struck with the deadly paleness and sternness of her countenance. Arthur could scarce believe that this severe-looking woman was the same as the girl who had so lately left them in the bloom of maiden beauty.

"Louise, what is the matter?" cried Frau Bonngart, as her daughter descended from the carriage and embraced her. "How is your aunt?"

"She is dead," answered Louise. "Did you not get my telegram?"

Frau Bonngart's face went at once into decent mourning, and she thought it a mark of respect to the memory of the departed not to say a word more. But another of the party answered—

"We have been out all day at Heisterbach."

This explained how it was that the news had not yet reached them. No one spoke further, except one of the two friends of the family, who, by way of lessening the gloom that had fallen upon the party, murmured, with much unction—

“It is what we must all come to !”

Having said this, and having expressed his condolence with Frau Bonngart, whose face, in spite of all her efforts, hardly matched his own for meaningless solemnity, this cheerful gentleman took his leave, bearing his fair friend with him.

Frau Bonngart and Louise got into the *droschky*, which drove at a funereal pace to the house. Here they found that Herr Bonngart had already started for Würzburg, leaving the telegram with Gretchen to explain his absence.

When the rest of the party reached home, they all welcomed Louise with much warmth and kindness. Arthur could not help remarking, as he again shook hands with her, how cold and trembling her hand felt. But he did not imagine he was shaking hands with a murderess !

## CHAPTER II.

### PRENEZ GARDE.

**T**HE same evening that witnessed the return of Louise, witnessed also another scene, in which Lessing was one of the chief actors. Arthur had promised to go to his rooms for half-an-hour immediately after supper, and he kept his word, determining, however, to remain as short a time as possible, lest Louise should fancy she was being slighted by his prolonged absence on the night of her return. Besides, he had in these days a reason, best known to himself, which kept him at home far more than had formerly been the case. In fact, his evening rambles with Lessing were now of very rare occurrence, and his Italian made as little progress as the business in an English Government office. To-night, how-

ever, he had promised to pay Lessing a visit, and a promise was of paramount obligation. In addition, he wanted to hear something of his young friend's doings, for of late the two had seen but little of each other.

"Well, how does the love affair progress?" asked Arthur.

"That's the very thing. Famously. It has cost me a deal of scheming," continued Lessing, looking for the moment like a pocket edition of Machiavelli, Richelieu and Talleyrand, "but all is turning out successfully. First I went to my friend, Mrs. Brownlow, who knows Miss Ross, and got her to ask my cousin and Mary to tea. Would you believe it?—the old cat refused point-blank!"

"What reason did she give?"

"I saw her letter. Mrs. Brownlow allowed me that miserable satisfaction. 'Miss Ross regretted extremely' (the old hypocrite!) 'that she was unable to accept Mrs. Brownlow's very kind invitation for two of her young ladies, but the half-year was now so near its termination, that it was desirable her pupils should concentrate all their energies upon their work.

She regretted still more to be obliged to add that the two young ladies who were honoured by Mrs. Brownlow's invitation had specially distinguished themselves by inattention to their studies.' This last disgusting libel," added Lessing, "was no doubt put in for my especial benefit."

"You think, then, she smelt a rat?"

"No doubt of it. If my cousin had been asked out alone, I daresay the dragoness would have given her consent. But she's as sharp and poisonous as a prickly cactus. Do you know, she suspects me of having played that serenade when you were with me."

"She must have a high opinion, then, of your instrumental abilities," said Arthur, laughing at the recollection of the lugubrious notes to which it had been his lot to listen.

"It wasn't so bad as all that," remarked Lessing, deprecatingly.

"But what makes you think that she suspects *you* of the performance?" inquired Arthur.

"Well, any one can see that the old duenna is very good at that kind of diplomatic arithmetic which consists in putting

two and two together. Her suspicions were, no doubt, aroused that first night when I escorted my cousin and Mary home. Then she must have guessed that my call was not really to her, or, for that matter, to my cousin, as I was contented, (to use her own words,) with such a short interview. Besides this," added Lessing, mysteriously, "I have received a positive hint on the subject."

"How? From whom?"

"That's what I am coming to. I forget whether I have already told you that when I left the dragoness' house, I had the presence of mind to give some 'backsheesh' to the servant who showed me out. I think she, too, suspected my real errand, and sympathized with me. For she is young and good-natured—not withered and cross-grained, like her mistress. At any rate, if she did not sympathize with me, she took very kindly to my money. I ventured to add that I should like to see her again, to make her another present, when she told me that she was to be met with every Thursday evening in the Rheingasse, at the house of a shoemaker named Bürger. I fancy the younger

Bürger is her sweetheart. Now, see what I have done."

So saying the young American took Arthur's arm and led him mysteriously into his bedroom.

"Do you see those?" he asked.

"I only see that the room looks a little more untidy even than usual," answered Arthur.

"Hang the untidiness! That's the servant's fault. But look there." And Lessing pointed to a shelf on which stood three pairs of the heaviest and clumsiest boots that ever German Bauer delighted to put on.

"There's diplomacy for you!" he exclaimed, proudly.

"It's diplomacy without the polish, then," answered Arthur. "Am I to understand that these are the handiwork of Herr Bürger?"

"Precisely. It was a master-stroke of policy on my part. I wanted to win him over to my side, but I had no excuse for offering him a direct bribe. He's one of your confounded German liberals, and wouldn't take any money he thought he hadn't earned"—Lessing could be very aristocratic in his sen-

timents at times—"so I hit upon this plan. I made my purse pass through my foot. This is the only kind of boot the wretched creature can make, so I was obliged to content myself with it."

"And you always wear these boots now?"

"Thank heaven, no!" answered Lessing, with a thrill of genuine horror. "The mere sight of them is enough to take away the appetite of a man with any proper feeling. But I have thought it judicious to wear them when I go to the maker's shop, and you don't know my sufferings, mental and bodily, on those occasions."

"Never mind, my dear fellow. Such heroic self-sacrifice must achieve great results. Yours can hardly now prove a *bootless* enterprise."

"To make a man's sufferings the subject of a jest—and such a stale one too—is an act worthy only of the most debased of mankind," retorted Lessing with much gravity. So saying he led the way back into his sitting-room.

"I remember once reading," continued Arthur, "of a man who did even more than you, but then his motive was patriotism cr

place—I forget which, the things are so liable to confusion. To obtain the support of a noble lord, whose influence he was very anxious to secure, and whose weakness was to fancy that he had a turn for amateur doctoring, this heroic fellow submitted to be ‘blooded’ by the said lord, and boasted ever afterwards that he was one of the few statesmen who could say that they had literally ‘bled for their country.’”

“I surpass him,” answered Lessing, with solemn pathos. “I have suffered both in blood and boots—the duel and the shoemaker—and I know which is the hardest to bear. But let me continue my account. You must know I went to the shop on the Thursday as appointed—I had, before this, ordered my first pair of boots there, besides buying some ready-made slippers, so I had a sort of claim to make inquiries—and asked for Johanna. Mr. Bürger, junior, looked both surprised and indignant.

“‘If the Herr means Fräulein Wolfenbittel,’ he answered, looking up from his shoe-board with much dignity, ‘she is here, but she cannot see him.’”

“Here was a go, Arthur! The fellow was evidently jealous, as well he might be” (Lessing glanced down complacently at himself), “and would not let me see the fair one. I descended to an apology and an entreaty.

“‘I beg your pardon,’ I said. ‘I did not know Fräulein Wolfenbuttel’s surname before. I have only seen her once, on business, and she herself requested me to meet her here. I think, if you will be kind enough to ask her, she would see me.’

“Here was an abject speech to make to a cobbler about a maid-of-all-work! However, I was determined to stick at nothing to gain my end.”

“It could not have cost *you* much as a republican,” interpolated Arthur.

“O, you Englishmen never will understand our views,” retorted Lessing, with a feigned expression of disgust. “However, the bear relented upon hearing this speech of mine. I suppose he thought that, if there had been anything wrong, Fräulein Wolfenbuttel would hardly have chosen his father’s shop as the *rendezvous*. Accordingly I was admitted into an interior apartment, smelling

horribly of *Sauerkraut* and sausage. There, sausage in hand, sat the fair Johanna. We had a long talk together. She told me lots about the school. That Miss Ross was hated for her meanness by everybody—teachers, pupils, and servants. Also that the news of my duel had reached the young ladies—that I knew already—who had agreed universally to regard me as a hero. I then ventured to ask a question or two about Miss Martin in particular. Oh, Fräulein Marteen raved about me—thought me the handsomest and most gallant gentleman she had ever seen, and a lot more to the same effect.”

“Pray let us hear it all, unless you find the task of blushing too fatiguing this hot weather.”

“Please to remember that *I* am not saying all this about myself,” answered Lessing, drawing a distinction between his words and thoughts which had not much real existence. “I hate self-praise. I do believe I’m one of the most humble-minded of men,” he added, with genuine seriousness.

“Your very last remark is a convincing proof of the fact.

“ You are always ‘ chaffing.’ Never mind, I shall tell my story my own way, only protesting against such uncalled-for interruptions. To continue. I then came to the point and asked Johanna if she thought she could convey a little note to Miss Martin. Johanna pondered a long time, and then answered she thought she could *not*. She would lose her place if the fact were discovered. I begged her to think of me and my feelings. She did think of them for five minutes, but without that effect which might have been anticipated. She was still afraid the thing was impossible. I implored, entreated, almost wept. But all in vain. I then drew from my pocket a Friedrich-d’or, which I had specially procured at Kahn’s bank that morning, and held it up before her. She eyed it for a moment and then seemed to think that, ‘ if the note were a very little one,’ it might be taken. It was a little one—who would dream of writing a *billet-doux* on foolscap paper ?”

“ A wise man might deem the choice not inappropriate,” suggested Arthur, *sotto voce*.

“ I gave her the note, written in my very best copper-plate upon pink enamelled paper,

with an embossed border of forget-me-nots, and at the top of the page the motto '*Treu und Fest*'—(True and Faithful)—to which I had thought it a good idea to add '*bis in den Tod*'—(till death). Johanna received the note and the Friedrich-d'or—the latter with much more respect than the former—and took a solemn oath to deliver the billet, at the first opportunity, to Miss Martin. I regretted to notice that, as preliminary steps, she crumpled it most indecently and impressed a greasy thumb on the direction—a sort of love post-mark, I suppose."

"But you leave out the most important point of all—what was in the note?"

"Respect the sacredness of the heart, my good fellow. Suffice it to say that, in a neat and poetic way, it conveyed the expression of my devoted and unalterable attachment, and besought Miss Martin to grant me an interview."

"That, I should think, was an impossibility, circumstanced as she is."

"Precisely. You cold men of the world never realize that the word 'impossible' has no place in the dictionary of love any more

than, according to Napoleon, in that of the French language. Know, then, that to-day I received by post this reply."

And Lessing drew from his pocket in triumph a small pink note, answering as nearly as possible to the description he had given of his own. This he kissed twice with much apparent satisfaction, and then proceeded to open it and run over the contents for the hundredth time.

"I suppose I may not ask what that note contains?" inquired Arthur, with a comic humility and resignation.

Lessing was dying to show it to his friend. He was too chivalrous, however, to do so. Instead of this he allowed its substance, little by little, to ooze out.

It was not a long letter; neither was it couched in terms quite so ardent as had probably been those of Lessing's own. But then it was very much to the point. It stated that Miss Ross was going out to a party with the bishop that evening—that the head governess was ill in bed, whilst the other was away for two or three days, so that there would be no difficulty in the proposed interview. Miss

Martin could answer herself for the three servants who slept in the house, and undertook to see that they were out of the way. If Mr. Lessing would come round to the schoolroom window—it was on the ground floor facing the back garden—at ten o'clock that evening, he would find it open, and might get into the room, where Miss Martin would meet him for two minutes only; she could not possibly stay longer.

“How clever she is!” exclaimed Lessing, enthusiastically, when he had conveyed all this to Arthur. “How wonderfully well she seems to have arranged everything! She must have quite a head for combinations.”

Arthur thought so too. “I suppose you do not want my advice?” he added.

“No, thank you; not in this case. But what would it have been, had I wanted it?”

“Don’t go. This is carrying the matter a little too far.”

“Not far enough for me,” answered Lessing, recklessly. “And it’s almost time for me to start,” he added.

Arthur looked at him with that look of half envy, half melancholy, which comes so

naturally to a man of thirty, when, regarding a boy of twenty. It seemed to say, "*Macte virtute esto!* Go on in the valour of your youth Who shall stay you in your joyous, impetuous, albeit inconsiderate career? I may be a trifle more prudent and more worldly-wise, but how gladly would I exchange these advantages for one hour of your sheer boyish exuberance!"

The friends sallied forth together, Arthur to go home, and Lessing to keep his sentimental appointment. The former found the whole family still up. When Herr Bonngart was away, they did not care to troop to bed so early. Louise raised her cold, glittering eyes as Arthur entered, and fixed one meaning glance upon him. He noticed it, but wist not what it should mean; and Louise marvelled within herself at what she fancied his cool audacity and deceit. The mystery as a whole was still as far from solution as ever, but one thing was growing evident to her—strive she never so much against it—and that was that Arthur's affection for her existed now no longer. It was a bitter conviction, but the bitterer it was the better it would nerve her

for the only thing that now remained—revenge. Were not all tonics sharp and acrid?

Meanwhile Lessing pursued his way in the highest spirits, whistling as he went, not “for want of thought,” but for excess of joy. He was really much in love with the fair young English girl, and he fancied himself even more in love than he was. He delighted in sentiment and romance. All his life long he had indulged in day-dreams, had in fact a fine property in air-castles—those princely *chateaux* of that now revolutionized romance-country—the Imagination. He was always picturing himself as a kind of nineteenth-century knight-errant, whose special mission it was to rescue oppressed damosels, and to fall in love with them afterwards; and this, it seemed to him, he had actually done. He had knocked down an impertinent intruder upon Miss Martin’s comfort—he had fought with him afterwards (not indeed *à l’outrance*, but that was not his fault)—he had played the troubadour under her window, and now he was going in true knightly fashion to steal a sweet interview with her in her castle of

duress. What could be more romantic, more congenial at the same time to his love of sentiment, his taste for adventure, and his keen sense of the greatness of his own merits? Well then might this *preux chevalier* whistle forth his satisfaction in light, cheerful melodies.

All at once he stopped. He had reached the house almost before he was aware of it, for the night was dark. His heart began to beat at the nearness of the event. Was it yet time? He walked to a neighbouring lamp-post to look at his watch. Yes, it only wanted two minutes to the appointed hour. By the time he had reached the school-room window it would have struck ten.

There was no need to climb over the wall; the great gate stood open, doubtless with the view of admitting Miss Ross's carriage on her return. This was an "undesigned coincidence" which pleased Lessing not a little. There was no doubt then that the harpy had gone forth to descend on some unfortunate host's viands. Stealthily did Lessing enter the enclosure. All seemed still and dark, except that a dim light burned in the

hall—a sort of perpetual fire, at which the returning vestal and the *Pontifex Maximus* might kindle their lamps. Lessing was not surprised. He knew that Miss Ross's household retired early, not only with a view to the wisdom that she saw promises, but also to the economy that the mistress practised. For young girls to sit up by candle-light was, in Miss Ross's eyes, "wasteful and ridiculous excess."

Lessing crept round to the back of the house. There was no mistaking the window designated. The ground floor boasted only one on that side, added after the house was built, in order to the (at least physical) enlightenment of Miss Ross's pupils. Noiselessly, almost burglariously, did Lessing try it. All was as it should be; the window was unfastened. Lessing opened it slowly and cautiously. Confound it! it gave a doleful creak! Lessing paused in dismay; he waited for any other sounds that this unfortunate one might generate; but happily he could detect none. All was silent as the grave.

He resumed his task, and opened the window as wide as it would go. Then he

peered cautiously into the darkness of the room. He could see and hear nothing. In another moment he had vaulted deftly over the window-sill, and stood in the Canaan of his hopes.

"Miss Martin," he said; softly — "Miss Martin."

No answer, but Lessing fancied he heard the rustling of a dress.

"Miss Martin," he repeated, in a voice of subdued tenderness, "are you here? Pray speak—it's me," (he was too excited to be grammatical).

"Who?" said an apparently timid voice, from the other end of the room.

"Miss Martin, you know who it is—it's me — Ittodus Lessing, who loves you to distraction. Do tell me where you are. I can't see you."

At the same time, however, his eyes, growing accustomed to the darkness, detected the dim outline of a female figure at the further end of the room.

There was doubtless the fair one—coy and retiring as it behoves all fair ones to be. This was all the more reason, however, why

Lessing himself should exhibit a little lover-like audacity. He moved boldly forward, stumbling over a footstool on the way. When he had reached the middle of the room, he stopped respectfully, and said—

“Miss Martin, could we not have a light? I am dying to see you again. It is so long since I last had that pleasure.”

The fair one did not reply. She seemed even shyer than Lessing had expected, and was certainly very chary of her words. It behoved him to press on yet more boldly, and to break down this barrier of reserve. He advanced a step nearer, and, to carry out more completely his ideas of chivalry, he knelt down on one knee before his idol.

“Miss Martin—Mary,” he said, “if I may venture to call you so, you don’t know how I have longed for this interview. I have thought of nothing else, dreamed of nothing else for weeks past, but how I might see you again. It is true, I can’t see you very well now, but it is the next best thing to know that you are here—to feel that you are near me. There must be some bond between us, for I feel the spell of your presence. I should

feel so differently, Mary, if it were' anyone else." (Lessing was a little infected with the Americo-Platonic doctrine of "affinities.") "You don't know how I love you! I can do nothing for thinking of you! My appetite is quite gone! As to reading, I never now open a book! May I hope, Mary, that this deep, this devoted love is in some measure returned?"

With this impassioned interrogation, Lessing stopped for a moment to take breath, and to wait for a word of encouragement. But the fair one was strangely coy. Instead of answering, she only coughed, and, with all his sentiment, Lessing could not but acknowledge to himself that the cough was a very hard and disagreeable one. Suddenly, at the sound of the cough, the door of the room was thrown wide open, and, to Lessing's utter horror and disgust, in stalked the Bishop of British Polynesia, holding a brilliant lamp in his hand.

Quick as thought Lessing started to his feet, but not before the right reverend and right inopportune prelate had detected him in his kneeling attitude. The young American

felt, however, for Miss Martin even more than for himself.

He glanced towards her. Horror of horrors ! What transformation had taken place ? Instead of the soft, coquettish face of his fair enchantress, his eyes encountered the hard, ligneous visage, and cold, basilisk eyes of —Miss Ross ! He had been making a declaration of attachment to the she-dragon herself !

For a moment he stood as one spell-bound. Then the truth flashed upon him. He had been trapped, outwitted, “sold !” Either Miss Martin had never sent the letter, or her share in the programme had been taken out of her hands by the never-sufficiently-to-be-accused duenna under whose care she lived.

At this unexpected and terrible *dénouement*, Lessing lost for the time his presence of mind. He really knew not what to do. He could only stand there abashed and helpless, muttering curses, not loud, but deep, on all schoolmistresses and prelates.

To say that Miss Ross enjoyed his confusion, would be to do that excellent lady an injustice. She did far more than this. She

positively revelled in it. Her eye almost danced with spiteful ecstasy as she contemplated the annoyance of her victim.

"Young man," she said, with malicious solemnity—"young man—for I do not think you deserve the title of young *gentleman*—may I beg you to account for your presence in my house at this hour, and uninvited?"

All Lessing's ingenuity would have been insufficient to satisfy Miss Ross on this head, even if she had not already heard his reasons as given with a tender prolixity from his own lips. He therefore only said, without much improving his position by the remark—

"I'm sure I beg your pardon, ma'am. I did not mean to disturb you."

"I am well aware of *that*," answered Miss Ross, with a scornful emphasis. "Had you intended me such an *honour*, I should have declined it, and I fancy every member of my household would have done the same. Perhaps, however, as you say you did not come to see me, you will be good enough to tell me whom you *did* come to see."

For the life of him poor Lessing wist not what to say. Miss Ross knew very well why

he had come, and had had what Lessing considered the ineffable meanness to listen to an avowal of love intended for another. And now, not content with this outrage, she must forsooth endeavour to force him to betray Miss Martin, and to criminate himself before a third person. That, however, he would never do. He remained silent.

"Will you be good enough to answer, sir?" continued Miss Ross, in the Old Bailey style in which she was accustomed to cross-examine her pupils.

Lessing felt intensely foolish, standing thus, school-boy-like, before his tormentor. But what on earth was he to say or do? He cast a despairing glance towards the window. The bishop was at the instant engaged in shutting it, with much episcopal action. How Lessing regretted he had not at once sprung out of it when he had first discovered his mistake. But the shock had been too great and sudden to permit him to do what was best. And now it was too late.

"My lord," said Miss Ross, turning to the bishop—who up to this time, still mindful of the fact that the invader was an American,

and might possibly not be without a revolver, had said nothing—"my lord, will you be good enough to demand of this young man an explanation of his conduct? I conceive I have a right to know upon what pretext he is found sneaking about my house."

Lessing's blood boiled at the word "sneaking." It had a worse than prosaic—almost police-court—ring about it, which clashed most offensively with his knight-errant theories.

"I am not in the habit of 'sneaking about' anywhere," he said, proudly.

"*Facta non verba!*" exclaimed the bishop, sententiously, thinking perhaps that his remarks might be made more safely in Latin.

But Miss Ross was by no means satisfied with this. She was determined to humiliate Lessing as much as possible, and she thought this could best be done by setting the bishop to rebuke him. But herein she erred. Lessing always felt helpless before a woman. But he was never inclined to bear much from a man, even though that man should wear gaiters and an apron.

"My lord," repeated Miss Ross, still more

impressively, "will you not help me to get the truth out of this young man?"

The bishop felt that his manhood demanded of him that he should say something more. Accordingly he cast about in his mind what that something should be. It was, however, very hard even for an episcopal mind to devise a speech which should at one and the same time satisfy Miss Ross without irritating Lessing. At last he said blandly, as one anxious to pour oil on the troubled waters :

"I am sure the young gentleman will have no objection to give every explanation."

"I have already apologized," said Lessing, "and I can do no more. I am extremely sorry that I have disturbed Miss Ross (this was touchingly true), and I need scarcely add that I entered her house with no bad intention."

"You must allow," remarked the bishop with unwonted temerity, "that your conduct, until explained, appears, to say the least, suspicious."

Lessing almost laughed at the mildness of the remark. To make a surreptitious entry into a lady's house at night *was* no doubt

"suspicious." He thought it best, however, to take as high a tone as possible.

"I am not at liberty to explain. But I have apologized and I should consider that anyone insulted me who demanded more."

This was said so fiercely and with such a well-feigned appearance of indignation that the bishop gave way at once.

"I think, Miss Ross, that that may be accepted as sufficient."

But Miss Ross was of a very different opinion. She did not at all like the turn the conversation had taken, and regretted exceedingly that she had let it out of her own hands. As regarded the bishop, she felt that all her respect for his office could not enable her to stomach the pusillanimity of the man. She exclaimed indignantly :

"Sufficient, my lord ! A lady's house is to be invaded in this sneaking manner at night by one who *professes* to be a gentleman—no explanation is to be vouchsafed and a bare apology, (which for my part I don't think worth having, when I consider the quarter whence it emanates,) is to be accepted as sufficient ! A pretty state of things indeed ! Why in

England such conduct would be termed *burglary* !”

Lessing's lip curled in scorn.

“I do not think, Miss Ross,” he said, with affected politeness, “that you need ever fear a burglary in your house. Burglars only come where there is something for them to get.”

“My lord,” shrieked Miss Ross, white with fury, “will you stand by and hear me insulted in this way?”

But the bishop had quietly disappeared. Doubtless he had to enter some postage stamps in his big book, but Miss Ross was uncharitable enough to fancy that he had withdrawn in order to avoid any disagreeable consequences to himself if he interfered further in the dispute. It is true he was professionally a man of peace, and it might be that, in this respect, his tastes coincided with his profession. But Miss Ross could only keep saying to herself, “So big and yet so timid !”

Lessing by this time was quite himself again. In fact, he was beginning to enjoy the situation. Miss Ross had failed as a tac-

tician, first, by introducing the bishop as an auxiliary, and, secondly, by prolonging the scene too far. His lordship had been defeated so easily that her antagonist was naturally inspirited in consequence, and, besides, the length of the encounter had given him time to recruit his own forces. The fact was that Miss Ross's extreme malevolence was defeating its own object. She had wished to torment her victim as long as possible, and, lo ! he was now risen from the rack and had the effrontery to defy her.

Lessing showed more judgment. Now, he thought, was his time to escape, whilst the enemy was in confusion from the defection of the episcopal ally. With much politeness but firmness he said, "I shall now have the honour of wishing you good-night, Miss Ross," and made as if he would go out by the door, which he guessed led into the passage. Thence he could easily let himself out by the front entrance.

This gave Miss Ross one last chance, and she was not slow to avail herself of it.

"The sooner you go the better," she said, with a sarcastic jeer, "but with regard to the

front door, I fear you will find it locked and the key taken away. If it were anyone else, I would have it opened. But with you I know it is not necessary. As you preferred to come in at the window, no doubt you will prefer to leave by the same aperture."

Lessing bit his lip. He felt that the dragoness had again got the best of it. It was certainly not a little humiliating to have to leave the house in such an ignominious way. Love ennobles and elevates anything, but in itself it is difficult to get in or out of a window with dignity. And to have to perform in this way under the very eyes of his adversary!

However, there was no help for it, so Lessing proceeded in silence to unfasten the window which the careful bishop had secured, and to open it deliberately. He did not like to vault through, not being able to see, or remembering with sufficient accuracy, the height from the ground, so he put one leg out first in a somewhat ungraceful fashion, which was robbed of none of its awkwardness by his own sense of the ridiculousness of the figure he was cutting. Meanwhile, Miss

Ross held the lamp close by, ostensibly to light his way, but really to enjoy the spectacle the better. Just as he was finally disappearing, she said with a sardonic smile :

“I won’t forget, Mr. Lesser, to give all your pretty messages to Miss Martin. She’ll wonder how you came to entrust them to me. Really it was worth something to hear them all !”

Before the flying Lessing could send back a Parthian shaft, the window was closed with a vindictive bang, and he was forced to allow that the victory rested with his crafty and pertinacious opponent. He hurried home to bed, and arose the next morning a sadder if not a wiser man. The Fates seemed clearly against him and Miss Martin.

## CHAPTER III.

### AN IMPENDING DEPARTURE.

**I**T cannot be said that Theodore Bonngart's love-suit had as yet made much progress. In spite of his mother's persevering machinations and his own praiseworthy assiduity, he could not but see himself that the citadel was as far as ever from surrendering at discretion. This much, however, he felt he had gained—Florence now regarded him much more as a friend than formerly, whilst Arthur was never tired of repeating to himself that he had, perhaps, up to the present time judged him falsely, or, if not, that a very great and agreeable reformation had taken place in the young student. Of this latter fact there could be no doubt. True love has always an elevating and ennobling effect, and by this time Theodore was most truly in love with Florence.

Even had he had no coarser inducements to lead him to court her favour, he would have felt supremely happy in the possession of her for the sake of love alone.

All this did not escape several other watchful pairs of eyes in the same household. Aunt Letty noted the growing attachment of the young German for her mistress with a feeling in which satisfaction and disgust were pretty evenly mingled — satisfaction, because she hoped in this way to see a stop put to the mischief which she feared was hatching between Florence and the Englishman — disgust at the inferiority of this new suitor to the merits of her mistress. Not but what Aunt Letty considered Theodore a thousand times more suitable as a *parti* than Arthur. He was, she said to herself, younger, handsomer, not perhaps much poorer, and, above all, not an Englishman. It was this last disqualification which, as she knew, would be most irritating to her master in Arthur's candidature. For Mr. Lovell, for reasons partly personal, partly political, was something more than a common Anglophobist. He was a veritable *Misanglist*, one who hated the English and all

pertaining to them with that deep personal hatred which is generally reserved for individuals. To believe that he would ever consent to the marriage of his daughter with an Englishman, was altogether beyond the range of Aunt Letty's imagination, and it behoved her, therefore, to make every effort to save her young mistress's heart from becoming hopelessly entangled in Arthur's designing meshes. It was true that a match with Theodore was in itself very revolting to Aunt Letty's sense of dignity and propriety, but, viewed in relation to the former contingency, it presented itself to her mind almost in the light of a relief.

It must not be supposed that Aunt Letty had been idle all this time. On the contrary, she had been at work with more perseverance and more cunning than ever. It must be added also, with even less success. She was forced to confess as much to herself, and to account for it by asserting that her young mistress had grown extremely capricious. And perhaps there was some truth in the accusation. Florence seemed always willing, if not anxious, to hear anything about Mr. Vaughan,

but directly Aunt Letty attempted to aim one of her cunning blows at his reputation, Florence would either peremptorily command her to be silent, or take upon herself the task of an indignant refutation of the calumny. All this was very trying to the soul of the faithful negress, and she could draw from it but one deduction, and that the deduction which, of all others, she was most unwilling to draw. It seemed to her that the only remaining hope lay in the success of Theodore Bonngart's suit, and she accordingly did her best in an indirect way to advocate the claims of that gentleman.

As to Theresa, she had been much discomposed by the sudden and unexpected return of her "dear little sister." She could trace no connection between this event and the despatch of her own letter, so, to account for it, she was obliged to fall back upon her pet theory, that a persistent ill-luck dogged her footsteps through life. And it was with a bitter feeling of disappointment that she saw herself for the moment powerless. She had done her best to lacerate her sister's heart, and hoped devoutly she had succeeded ;

but Louise herself was now no mean diplomatist, and took good care to conceal what she suffered from the watchful eyes of her sister. Not even to her mother had she confided the real state of her affections, and Frau Bonngart had thought it desirable for her part to maintain that kind of tacit understanding which she knew already subsisted between her daughter and herself.

Meanwhile Arthur's conduct was to Louise an inexplicable mystery. Had he altogether forgotten that memorable interview, or was he the most consummate of hypocrites and perfidious of traitors? He went in and out, he talked, he laughed, he jested, as if no black load of falsehood rested on his mind. He seemed to have no embarrassment in conversing even with Louise herself. He never referred to the past, and she would have perished rather than have stooped to this humiliation. Thus they were not in the way of arriving at a mutual understanding.

One thing, however, was clear to Louise, and that was, that however much Arthur and Florence might be attached to each other, nothing like a formal engagement as yet

subsisted between them. This had been a pure fabrication on the part of her sister. And events soon took a turn which induced Louise to doubt more and more whether such an engagement would ever arise.

The fact was that Arthur, self-distrustful and diffident though he was, had at last begun to suspect that Florence's feeling towards him was something more than mere friendship. He could not but notice that she seemed to hang upon his words, even as he did upon hers—that she was apparently happier in his society than in that of any one else. For Florence was rather deficient in that feminine cunning, which conceals impenetrably the feelings. She could not help to some extent betraying herself. And Arthur, though at first he had regarded the idea that she would ever return his affection as in the highest degree chimerical and absurd, was yet forced to allow that it seemed very much as if this height of absurdity had actually been attained.

The discovery affected him profoundly. The first sensation that it brought was one of the most rapturous and ecstatic joy. Here was the other half of the divine dualism. It was now

some time since he had been experiencing the blessedness of "to love"—here at last was the glorious complement, "to be loved." His heart leapt as it had never before leapt in his lifetime. All creation seemed aglow with new and joyous splendour, as at the descent of an archangel. If merely to love—merely to throw out the tender creepers of the heart over an unconscious and unreciprocating soul—was such a priceless privilege, who should describe the bliss of knowing that this love was returned? It was that culmination, that utter quintessence, of happiness, of which pure and lofty natures alone are capable.

But then, following only too closely on this rapturous sensation, came another of a totally opposite character. Circumstanced as Arthur was, he knew that it was impossible for him, as a man of honour, to avail himself of any affection that Florence might feel for him. The past still held him in its chains; he could not shake off the obligations to which, in a moment of weakness, he had been induced to subject himself. There was that in his previous life which had already tinged it with

gloom, and which now threatened to make the gloom yet deeper. But there could be nothing more sacred than honour, and Arthur held himself constrained by his honour to keep aloof from any kind of engagement. And in this case it would be in the highest degree base and selfish to permit the growth, or foster the development, of any feeling towards himself, on the part of Florence, which might lead her to desire or expect such a result.

What, then, was to be done ? Arthur had before this thought of taking refuge in flight, but had then felt himself unable to tear himself away from the enchanted spot. At that time he had had only his own safety, his own interest to consider. That it was perilous to himself to remain he had been well aware ; and he had decided to face the peril rather than to deprive himself of the charm of Florence's society. But it had never occurred to him that there might be peril also to her in such a course, or doubtless he would have decided differently. Now, however, that this fact seemed plain, equally plain appeared to be his duty. The question was no longer one of taste, but of obligation. He must, as an

honourable man, part from Florence, even though the severance should cost him more than life itself.

Already had he tried as much as possible to dissociate himself from her. He had, much to Florence's surprise, and not a little to her secret disappointment, himself proposed that Louise should resume her post as instructress. Then, too, he was now seldom at home. Lessing was surprised by the sudden increase in the number of his visits. Florence could not but notice with pain and astonishment that he seemed in a way to shun her, though, when they were thrown together, his manner was as kind and even tender as ever. Louise, too, remarked the change, and, though she could not draw from it any very promising augury for herself, it was some satisfaction to her to perceive that her rival's chances were so unmistakably diminishing.

It was but natural that poor Florence should have been utterly unable to comprehend the turn things had taken. She was herself so young and inexperienced that it never occurred to her that Arthur should be fettered by an obligation to which even his

love must be made to submit. Had he not himself told her that his heart was free? And had she not, over and over again, since the dawn of her own love, noted slight but, as she thought, significant indications of a similar feeling on his part? Why, then, should he thus suddenly change? Why had he never made any formal proposal? Was it that he was naturally the most fickle of men? She spurned the unworthy thought. Had she then been deceiving herself all along in fancying that he loved her? This was indeed possible, but her keen feminine instinct told her it was most improbable. It is easy to mislead the intellect—very difficult to deceive the heart. Was it then, finally, that he was practising a sort of experiment—trying to discover how much she really loved him—endeavouring to find out if her affection would evaporate before a little coldness and neglect? Such a course of action seemed unworthy of Arthur—unworthy of the confidence and trust which should exist between kindred souls; but, in default of a better, Florence was almost driven to accept this explanation of his conduct.

Hence arose a new complication. Florence was not without her little feminine weaknesses, and she could not but feel piqued by the suspicion of her fickleness, which she fancied Arthur entertained. She determined to punish him for this, and could think of no better way than by appearing to receive with a greater appearance of interest Theodore Bonngart's attentions.

This again was noticed by Arthur, and induced him to modify the opinion he had formed respecting Florence's attachment to himself, and to decide, at any rate, upon postponing his departure for a while until events should have declared themselves more plainly. He even thought it his duty, though it cost him a most desperate effort, to give Theodore a word of encouragement. By this time he had quite changed his view of that young gentleman's character, and saw no reason why, if Florence liked him, he should not make her happy. It was true that, like Aunt Letty, he thought no one good enough for such a prize; but that was a matter rather for Florence's decision than his own. On one

of the few occasions when he and Theodore found themselves alone together he said—

“Have you made up your mind yet as to your future profession, Theodore?”

“Yes, I think so,” answered the latter. “It is pretty well settled that I am to be an advocate.”

“And then I suppose you will be thinking of marrying?”

“I daresay,” said Theodore, looking up in some astonishment.

“I think,” continued Arthur, smiling an exceeding bitter smile, “that I know where your choice is likely to fall.”

Theodore was surprised at this style of conversation. He had always regarded Arthur as his rival, and could hardly imagine what might now be coming.

“I am sure,” resumed Arthur, enthusiastically, “you could not make a better choice, and,” he added, sadly, “you have my best wishes for your success.”

Theodore started up impetuously and shook Arthur warmly by the hand. He felt he had wronged him in suspecting him of rivalry, and

yet how clear the existence of that rivalry had lately seemed !

“Thank you so much for your good wishes !” he exclaimed. “I do indeed love Miss Lovell dearly.”

“She is worthy of all your love,” said Arthur, swallowing his feelings with a gulp, “and I am sure you will do all you can to make her happy. I am an old fellow myself, but still I take a great interest in her welfare, and I could not help noticing your attentions. She seems, too, to reciprocate them.”

“Of late I have fancied so,” answered Theodore, whilst a blush of satisfaction overspread his face.

“There seems little doubt of it,” said Arthur, in a sepulchral voice, which was meant to be cheerful and congratulatory.

It may well be supposed that this dialogue, short though it was, gave great pleasure to Theodore. It was evident that he had now a clear field, and had only to go in and win. And Arthur’s conduct proved that there had been no *arrière pensée* in what he had said. He kept as much from Florence as possible, as

if with the view of leaving her entirely to Theodore. And Florence, piqued still more at Arthur's continued neglect, appeared from day to day to receive the young advocate's addresses more favourably.

Nor did this little dialogue fail to reach the ear of the young American. Theodore had repeated it to his mother, and she had communicated it to Letty, who conveyed a distorted, but, as she thought, highly diplomatic, version of it to her young mistress. For Aunt Letty was one of those dense *media* through which a fact cannot pass without immeasurable refraction.

Florence was not surprised to hear on this good authority that Theodore Bonngart entertained a tender feeling for herself. She had suspected as much for some little time past. But she did not give it credit for being of any very deep or lasting character. She thought it a mere piece of flirtation, which would pass over, leaving the heart unscathed. But therein she wronged the young student, who, with all his failings, had a capacity for true affection, which seemed

now in a fair way of being either permanently satisfied or eternally disappointed.

But what seemed to Florence beyond measure astounding, was the part Arthur had taken in the dialogue. If he could recommend her to another, was it not clear that he had no thought of her for himself? Was, then, his fancied love a mere illusion, begotten of the wish that dominated her heart? Was it a mere sweet dream, exceeding beautiful whilst it lasted, but now gone fading into the cold, grey morning of reality? The thought was more bitter than wormwood; and yet, did not everything tend to confirm it? She was forced, in spite of herself, to allow that there seemed no other plausible explanation. And yet her heart hoped on, whilst her reason bade her despair.

She knew not what to do. As yet she was unused to suffer. Up to the present time Life had been to her a mere child's bauble for her to toy withal. Each day the glittering kaleidoscope had changed the arrangement of its pieces, but never, hitherto, the brightness of its colouring. And now, on a sudden, all was chill and sombre. Sun, moon, and

stars gone withering all at once from the angry heaven of her life. Without, all darkness ; within, all sorrow.

The tendrils of her heart had twined themselves round Arthur even more closely than she had herself been aware. She had learnt to rely on his great, strong nature, and to rejoice in the tenderness of his care. She felt that, without him, existence must henceforth be loneliness. Why, she asked, had he treated her thus ? Why had he allowed her to fancy that he loved her, and then thus suddenly withdrawn himself ?

A moment later she checked the querulous thought. She could not understand Arthur's conduct, but she would not run the risk of wronging him, even in imagination. No ; she would still believe in him, still love him. This was now her only solace.

The next morning, when, after an unusually restless night, she came down to her late breakfast, she found Arthur awaiting her. The two still usually breakfasted together. Arthur came forward to greet her. He could not but notice the pallor of her face, and the tint of night under the deep, starry eyes.

“Miss Lovell,” he said, in a voice of exceeding softness and tenderness, “I am afraid you are not well?”

“Yes, thank you,” answered Florence, extending her little hand with a sweet, sad smile, which went straight to Arthur’s heart. He still gazed at her with eyes brimful of loving tenderness, and, as Florence looked up and noted them, she could not but feel certain of his truth and earnestness. She remarked, too, that Arthur seemed to be meditating some communication, which he appeared to have a difficulty in getting into speech. After a little delay he began, with a doleful attempt at a light, airy style—

“Miss Lovell, do you know I have a piece of news for you?”

Florence raised her eyes. She felt a presentiment that the news would not be agreeable.

“What is it?” she asked.

“Nothing very important—at least, to any one but myself. I am going to leave Bonn.”

Florence gave a little start. She could not help herself. It was so slight, that even

Arthur did not notice it. She was already pale, but she turned yet paler.

"It will not be for long, I hope?" she said at last, trying hard at the same time to conceal and control her feelings. But her voice trembled in spite of herself.

Arthur had not dared to look at that pale, pure face, as he conveyed his news. But now, thrilled to his inmost heart by the sad music of her voice, he raised his eyes involuntarily. As he gazed, he became more than ever convinced that it was his duty to flee. In spite of every appearance to the contrary—in spite of the favour with which Theodore's suit seemed of late to have been regarded—Arthur felt at that moment deliciously, and yet remorsefully, certain that Florence loved him. And at the same instant a similar conviction shot through the soul of the young girl, that Arthur, in spite of his apparent neglect, loved her. It was a moment of sweet, yet sad, consciousness for both. Sweet from the certainty of love—sad from the difficulty that seemed to lie in its way.

For a moment Arthur could not answer that soft, appealing question. And for the moment Florence's heart beat quicker as the thought forced itself upon her that now perhaps at last Arthur would say something which would enable them once for all to understand each other. Fain, indeed, would his lips have done so, but a stern sense of duty kept him back. It behoved him, he thought, at all cost to himself, to make the future clear to her he loved. It would never do that during his absence she should still feed in imagination and memory upon him. Thus would her life be wasted in an useless and hopeless expectation. He must say something which should make her dismiss him and his image for ever from her mind. He felt his heartstrings cracking, as he said, with a ghastly attempt at a smile—

“I do not think of returning.”

Florence helped herself to coffee. The tears were almost welling from her eyes, and she did this to give herself an excuse for bending down her head. What should she say in reply? Arthur's speech seemed cruel,

but she could not make a cruel, or even an indifferent one, in return.

"We shall all miss you very much," she said at last—"I in particular."

A joy-light danced in Arthur's eyes. Those three last words were to him a kind of heart-Shekinah. Yet was he not bound to regret the feeling they seemed to indicate? He resumed, as coldly and dispassionately as he could—

"I must return to England, on important business, and I shall probably never come back to Germany again. You know," he continued, with a desperate attempt at *nonchalance*, "that I am now a good enough German scholar, and it would be waste of time to remain longer in Bonn under these circumstances, however pleasant the place and its associations may be."

"Waste of time!" "Pleasant!" What manner of man was this, who could so talk of what to Florence was more than life itself? Yet she could not, and would not, be angry with him. Hers was not a nature that can do things by halves. She had given her-

self wholly to him, and even now it was not in her to blame him. Only she prayed to understand him better.

"When do you go?" she asked, still in the same low, musical voice, every note of which brought a kind of guilty joy to Arthur's heart.

"In a very few days now—as soon, in fact, as I can pay my bills and get my things in order."

"Is it not rather a sudden determination?"

"Just at the last it is perhaps sudden," answered Arthur, "but I never intended to remain in Germany after I had mastered the language. As it is, I am afraid" (he added, almost involuntarily), "that I have remained too long."

"Why? I do not understand."

"I cannot explain!" cried Arthur, almost violently, for he felt he knew not how—such a host of conflicting emotions were struggling at that moment in the narrow continent of his single breast. "It is, Miss Lovell, one of the saddest things in life that so many of us

are forced to go on year after year misunderstood by our fellow-creatures—that there are so many things which it is impossible to explain, and yet which are generally the very ones that a man most desires to make clear——”

Arthur stopped short and bit his lip. In his impetuosity he was treading dangerously near the ground it behoved him most of all to avoid.

Florence, however, was not surprised at this excited speech, or at its abrupt termination. Though she could not fathom its exact meaning, it seemed to help her to understand Arthur's nature. She was more than ever glad that she had not judged him harshly in her thoughts. She began to see that there must be some invisible constraint upon his words and actions, the origin of which she could not understand. But she was more than ever convinced that he himself was true and noble, and that in his heart of hearts he treasured her image.

Arthur resumed in a lower key and a more composed manner :

"Don't you agree with me, Miss Lovell, that there is a depth of sadness in the isolation which seems to exist amongst human beings?"

"Keble has the same thought," said Florence:

" 'Not ev'n the tend'rest heart, and next our own,  
Knows half the reasons why we smile or sigh.' "

"I do not agree with Keble there," replied Arthur, "much as I admire him generally. I do not go so far as that; I spoke only of acquaintances. You will guess what I now mean, from what I once said about friendship. I think it is possible for *one* heart thoroughly to understand another, but it is possible for one heart alone. Acquaintances only get near each other. But the one true friend is admitted into the secret chambers of the soul, and understands everything by a kind of divine intuition."

Again the conversation was getting dangerous, and it was perhaps well for both that at this moment Louise entered the room and disturbed the *tête-à-tête*. She cast a sharp glance at the two, and divined at once that

their conversation had possessed some unusual interest.

"You look as grave as judges!" she exclaimed, with a short dry laugh.

"Or as guilty as criminals?" inquired Arthur, with an attempt at banter which was very little suited to his present frame of mind.

"I am sorry I disturbed you," continued Louise, sarcastically. "I see you have not yet finished your breakfast."

"O, yes we have," exclaimed Arthur and Florence, rising simultaneously. "We are shockingly late this morning."

"Would you like to take your lesson now, Florence?" asked Louise.

Florence felt very much disinclined for this performance, but she consented with a tolerably good grace. Not only was she in no mood for study, but she found Louise much less agreeable as a teacher than Arthur. The fact was, that the evil passions that had of late brooded over Louise had produced their inevitable effect upon her temper, and Florence could not help marvelling to herself at the change that seemed to have come over her

former friend during her absence from home. The wind had been sown, once for all, but the whirlwind crop would never cease, in some form or other to be reaped.

## CHAPTER IV.

### AN EVENTFUL WALK.

THE obsequies of Frau Schönbrunn had long ere this been celebrated, at a cost which must almost have made the poor lady turn in her coffin, and Herr Bonngart had returned to the bosom of his family. He brought with him a piece of news which was not so satisfactory to himself as it should have been to another member of his family: Frau Schönbrunn had left all her fortune, including her house in the Kettengasse, to Louise Bonngart, "in token of her appreciation of the kind and dutiful way in which her niece had nursed her in her illness." The whole, amounting to more than forty thousand thalers (£6,000), was devised absolutely without restriction, and subject only to a small annuity

to be paid to the faithful Justine. There were no other pecuniary legacies, but Herr Bonngart was presented with the somewhat threadbare wardrobe of Frau Schönbrunn's late husband. To Frau Bonngart were restored, with many thanks, two or three inexpensive presents, which she had from time to time given to her sister in the interests of diplomacy, whilst Theodore came into possession of a much-valued receipt for brewing beer, and Theresa became mistress of a worn-out work-box.

Forty thousand thalers is a large sum in Germany, and, even in America, it would form no slight addition to a young lady's attractions. But it hung round the neck of Louise like one of those fabled sarcophagic collars, which ate their way into the flesh of those who wore them. It was a heaping of fiery coals upon her head on the part of her murdered aunt, which she felt herself almost unable to endure. Perpetually before her mental vision rose the distorted features of Frau Schönbrunn lying in her death agony, and the words "kind and dutiful" came into a ghastly and, as it were, incestuous alliance with such a scene. There was a horrible irony in the juxtaposition

of the two ideas. Louise was almost minded to fling the money from her. Was it not as bad as the price of blood? Did it not seem to burn her hands as the thirty pieces of silver did those of the man of Kerioth?

Yet Louise could not resolve to relinquish it at once. Her plans—perhaps her crimes—were not yet over; for Louise persisted in her intention either to win Arthur back to herself, or to be avenged upon her who had dared to draw him away. At present things were in a kind of transition state. She wist not what to think. Arthur's conduct and that of Florence were alike mysterious. In spite of herself the bitter thought would sometimes rise in her mind that, for aught she could at present do at home, she might as well have remained at Würzburg. Was it then possible that, after all, the deep, damning blot upon her soul had been fixed there without necessity? She could not, she would not believe anything so maddening. Its absolute necessity had seemed to her some faint, feeble extenuation; but what if there had been no such force of fate?—what if it had all been done in a kind of ghastly error?—what if it had been,

to use the grim jest of the French minister, "worse than a crime—a blunder?"

As she thus thought, Louise muttered yet more fearful imprecations on the head of Theresa. If all else were a mistake, there could be no mistake in the tenour and object of that note, which had wrought such a fearful result; and if all else failed, she would yet take vengeance on the sister who had written it. Meanwhile she could only wait and watch; and so, waiting and watching, she would strive to be calm and agreeable. If she was to play the tigress once again, she would play it thoroughly, she would be smooth and velvety, as well as crafty and vindictive. And she would keep her money, in case it should be wanted for her plans.

And now there burst upon herself and the whole household the unexpected news that Arthur was going. He had made known his intention at dinner-time on the same day as he had communicated it to Florence. All had stared in astonishment; all had, at first, believed him jesting. He had been with them so long, and had seemed so thoroughly identified with them, that it was hard to

realize that he was about to leave them. But, when they were at last convinced that he was in earnest, the news proved a sad blow to several members of the party. In fact, it was only Theresa and Aunt Letty who were able to derive unmitigated pleasure from the prospect. It has already been seen how it affected Florence. Nor was it less painful to Louise. And as to Herr Bonngart, he was almost inconsolable, though from a widely different cause. He could not bear the idea of losing the income he had so long and so easily derived from Arthur. This so preyed upon his mind, that he grew quite dejected, and gave Arthur the impression that he held a higher place in the affections of the worthy Herr than perhaps the reality warranted. Frau Bonngart, too, could not but regret the necessary failure of one half of her scheme, that must result from the premature departure of Arthur. And even Theodore, who a week ago would have done anything in his power to rid himself of a formidable rival, felt now some genuine regret at the thought of parting from one whom he had grown to regard as a disinterested friend.

Many and urgent were the attempts made to induce Arthur to change his resolution ; but he had not taken it without much and anxious deliberation, and he was determined that nothing should now induce him to lay it aside. It had seemed clear to him that, whether Florence were attached to him or not, he was now almost equally bound to leave her ; for, even if he were not a suitor, it was hardly possible for him to avoid appearing in that light, and this had a natural tendency to deter others. Besides, it behoved him to leave the field quite clear for Theodore, and this it was impossible to do, so long as he remained in the same house with Florence.

“And when do you go, Herr Forn ?” asked Herr Bonngart, anxious to know how soon this one of his milch kine might be expected to run dry. “Not just yet, I hope ?” he added with genuine pathos.

“I must leave, if possible, within a week,” answered Arthur.

Herr Bonngart’s face grew yet longer than before. It recovered its cheerfulness a little, however, as he reflected that Arthur would no doubt pay him for a month, whilst he

(Herr Bonngart) would be at charges with him only for a week. This was, as far as it went, a profitable arrangement, but alas! all too temporary.

"We shall miss you very much," said Frau Bonngart, repeating Florence's expression, but in a very different voice. It seemed to Arthur a kind of profanation that she should, however unconsciously, use the same words.

"I shall be very sorry to go," he answered, "but one must not devote oneself to pleasure entirely. *Die Kunst ist lang und unser Leben kurz,*" (art is long, life short).

"But you have no profession, Herr Forn," exclaimed the Frau, who was always on the watch for information.

"None, at any rate that I practise," answered Arthur, laughing. "But I must do something. I cannot bear to be idle."

"You have not been idle here, I am sure," said Florence.

"No, not up to the present time, but I fear I should be if I remained, for German is now no longer a labour to me."

"There is always something fresh to learn

in it, however," suggested Herr Bonngart, whom a chance of making or losing money rendered almost as diplomatic as his wife.

"True. It is a long time before one can say one knows a language thoroughly ; but I shall not give up reading German when I am in England."

"Well, I must say I think you have seen Bonn very thoroughly," said Frau Bonngart.

"And yet I think we ought to make a kind of farewell expedition together," suggested Arthur, with a barely successful attempt at a smile.

"By all means," said Frau Bonngart, "though I doubt whether I shall be able to join you. But where would you go?"

"I vote for the Venusberg. It is not far, but it is so lovely and we can ramble about in the woods as long as we like."

"Then let us fix it for next Wednesday. You will not be going before Thursday, I suppose, at the earliest?"

"I expect Thursday will be the day."

During the week that intervened between the date of this conversation and that of the proposed expedition, it cannot be said that

Arthur conducted himself with much, if any, wisdom. He had determined to make the greatest of all sacrifices—the separation from Florence—but he could not bring himself to make the minor one of avoiding her society during the few days that yet remained. He seemed to have grown suddenly reckless or to be seeking in some measure to indemnify himself by anticipation for the future, by enjoying himself as much as might be in the present. His heart smote him the while he acted thus. He felt that he was inconsistent—that he was contradicting his own resolution—but he extenuated his error to himself by a reference to the shortness of the time that yet remained, and to the dreary life-long separation that was so rapidly approaching. And could he not have extenuated his conduct at all, it is to be feared he would still have acted as he did ; for it was not in the nature of things that a love, great and devouring as his, should not at times have asserted itself even in defiance of reason and of duty. *De amoribus non est disputandum.* One may not argue what love will do. For this is one of those things in which the judgment has neither part nor lot

—a mere *dulce sinrazon*, as the Spaniards happily call it—the “sweet unreasonableness” that rejects all argument, but is yet exceeding wise in the higher knowledge of the heart.

How fast that week went for Arthur and Florence needs not here to be described. It glided by bright and glorious as an Indian summer. Even the bitter knowledge of what was in store for both could not rob it of its sweetness. It needed not indeed these last days of intercourse—hallowed as they were by the thought of the impending separation—to teach their hearts how closely they were really intertwined—yet had this been needed, assuredly those fateful days would quickly have convinced them of the fact. Each clung in thought the closer to the other, as the dreaded hour of parting drew nigh. And, when the Wednesday came and Arthur's departure remained still fixed for the morrow, the hearts of both felt so big with love and sorrow that they scarce knew how to calm their throbbings.

It was in these days too that the vague suspicions of Louise first ripened into certainty. She became convinced that Florence had really

supplanted her. On Florence, then, should her vengeance fall.

It was a beautiful autumnal day as the little party sallied forth from Herr Bonngart's house on their way to the Venusberg. They passed through the Spinnerstrasse, where, seated at his window, was Lessing. The young American looked in high spirits, and Arthur guessed at once that his luck had turned in the matter of his *inamorata*. The two friends exchanged nods and glances as Arthur passed by, and the latter was thereby reminded that he had to take farewell of Lessing that evening.

All Herr Bonngart's household, including the worthy Herr himself and his invalid wife, had turned out in Arthur's honour. Not only so, but several friends of the family had been invited to swell their ranks. There was a young law-student, rich and handsome, who was very attentive to Louise, whilst Theodore was taken in tow, in spite of himself, by a bright-eyed young Fräulein for whom he had in days gone by entertained a sneaking affection. He felt that he could not so far repudiate the past as to refuse the young lady all attention.

On the contrary, he did his best to make himself agreeable to her, thinking that he had now nothing to fear from Arthur, and that from this time forth Florence's society would be entirely his own.

Thus it came to pass that, when the party arrived at that hill which commands so fair a view of Bonn, Arthur and Florence found themselves alone, and a little behind the others. They turned for the moment to contemplate the scene. Beneath them lay the town, with its long rows of well-built houses, and the green chesnut trees of the Allée, and Poppelsdorf, with its quaint old Schloss and dreary botanical garden. There, more to the left, on the crest of the next hill, stood the cloister and chapelry of Kreutzberg, with its pilgrim-stations dotting the circuitous ascent. Far away, over the great plain that lies between Bonn and Cologne, rose the pinnacles of the latter city, above which towered in lofty grandeur, though still unfinished, the colossal cathedral—that masterpiece of Gothic architecture. If you cast the eye in front you might see far across the Rhine to Siegburg, with its Irren-Haus, so picturesquely

built on the only elevation in that flat alluvial land which lies between the Sieg and the Rhine. Then to the right was the great chain of the Siebengebirge, and, further yet in the same direction, the hill of Godesberg, crowned with its one remaining turret.

Often as Arthur and Florence had surveyed this scene before, they had never wearied of its beauty, and now it seemed to both to derive a new and special interest from the fact that one of those who gazed was so soon to lose sight of it, perhaps for ever. So melancholy did this thought make Florence, that she turned all at once abruptly away, and suggested that they should go on. They did so, walking it is true very slowly ; for neither cared to overtake the main body, and each was counting the precious moments of this last private interview.

They soon reached the pleasant woods that clothe the Venusberg, and taking, by chance or half-unconscious purpose, a different path to that of their companions, found themselves wandering in a quiet, sequestered glade. Their hearts were so full that hitherto but little had been said—each fearing lest too much should

escape. But now Arthur spoke, and spoke of that which was uppermost in the minds of both :

"Miss Lovell, it seems to me almost like leaving home to quit this beautiful place."

"It is strange how attached one gets to places," answered Florence, scarce wotting what she said.

"One cannot help, I think, getting attached to all beauty, whether that of nature or of persons."

"And yet you would not place these two attachments on the same footing."

"O, dear no ! That of nature is the tender, reverential feeling of a son towards his mother. That of persons is——. Look here, Miss Lovell !"

He stooped down suddenly and pointed to one of those woodland flowers, the blossoms of which grow in pairs upon one stalk. He tore one off.

"Now," he said grimly, "either the flower must die, which were perhaps best for it, or live on a cheerless life, robbed of its beauty and its joy."

Florence understood the allegory only too

well. She, too, felt the full blackness of the future. Was there, then, no escape? What was this inexorable fate that was pursuing Arthur so relentlessly?

"Is it not cruel," she said, at last, stooping down and picking up the blossoms, "to treat even a flower thus?"

"Cruel! Is God then cruel? for He does the same with souls."

There was a bitterness and a wildness in Arthur's speech which Florence had never before noticed. Self-contained as he usually was, his passionate feelings were for once overmastering him. She felt to the full as much, but was she not a woman, and, therefore, better able to endure?

"Do not think that God is cruel," she answered, in that sweet, low voice which was so dear to Arthur's ear. "Think only that we do not comprehend Him fully."

But this time even that voice did not suffice to soothe the maddened soul of Arthur. He felt, for the moment, as one for whom nothing else remained except to "curse God and die."

"Let us think, rather," he cried, "that

there is no God at all, since his ways are so hard and pitiless. Let us think that it is a mere blind, unfeeling fate, and no Divinity that shapes our ends. Or if there be a God, then verily he sits beside his nectar, careless and indifferent, whilst the bolts of untold suffering transfix the hearts of his creatures."

Florence was shocked, yet her heart told her that this outburst was the passionate cry of a love that disappointment had goaded into madness. And she felt that she could forgive it—nay, more, that she could love Arthur all the better for it. It was not his own true self that was thus speaking—it was the evil spirit, that is ever on the alert to enter a wasted heart.

She felt deeply for him, more deeply even than for herself. Had there not been on her the restraining consciousness of her love, she would have laid her hand, sister-like, upon his arm and striven by touch and gesture to soothe and comfort him. But she was not now what she had been some weeks ago. If this consciousness of love was sweet and precious, it was also shy and reticent. She had

been a mere impulsive girl—she was now a queen, sitting on the loftiest throne of human nature, with the noblest crown of feeling on her brow, and she could not move and act as she had been wont to do. So she cast her eyes on the ground and said, shyly, with a wisdom born rather of intuition than of reason—

“It is hard to suffer, but I would rather suffer than doubt.”

Arthur turned round and looked her almost full in the face. She blushed beneath his gaze. But his evil mood had departed from him at the truthful music of those words, as the spirit fled from Saul at the sound of David’s harp, and he exclaimed, in an altered voice—

“Thank you, Miss Lovell, thank you a thousand times. You are, indeed, my good angel.”

They walked on awhile in silence through the pleasant glade, while the tree-filtered sunshine fell on them and around them, until Florence asked—

“And are we never to see you again, Mr. Vaughan?”

"I fear, *never*," he answered, impulsively. "I could wish, *often*. Hear me, Miss Lovell. I shall not have an opportunity of speaking to you again. You have always been my friend. Will you be my friend so far as to let me tell you a secret?"

"I should like to hear it," answered Florence, simply, yet trembling as one trembles who stands on the brink of some unfathomed abyss.

"I hope you will not think the worse of me," continued Arthur, wildly. "I value your good opinion above all things else on earth."

Arthur felt he was saying too much, but he could now scarce help himself. He could not leave Florence for ever without giving her some explanation of his conduct, yet he feared lest this very explanation should alienate her from him. As to Florence, she could not but feel nervous and uncomfortable, yet she answered, with her usual winning frankness—

"I do not think I could ever have any but a good opinion of you."

"What will you say when I tell you

that I am not what I seem—that I am—*engaged*?”

The fatal word fell like a thunderbolt upon Florence, and struck her spirit into the depths of darkness. She started aside like the broken bow, which, for the time, she felt herself to be. Here was the secret at last—the mystery that had baffled her so long! Strange as it may seem, it had never once occurred to her. Arthur had never mentioned his *fiancée*—never seemed to write to her, or to hear from her! What wonder, then, if Florence, with the rest of Herr Bonngart's household, had grown firm in the belief that he was altogether free from any such tie?

The greater, therefore, was Florence's surprise, and the harder was it for her to realize the certainty of the bitter fact.

Under these circumstances was it possible, she asked herself, that Arthur loved her? And had she any right to love him? Had not all been a dream, and was not this the awaking? And a cold, bitter awaking enough!

Overcome with conflicting emotions she

remained silent. In any case it would have been difficult to say anything. Had she not been personally interested, it would have been awkward to discuss his engagement with Mr. Vaughan. As it was, the task seemed impossible.

Arthur misconstrued her silence.

"Miss Lovell," he said, in a voice low and trembling with the intensity of his emotion, "you despise me. I have forfeited that good opinion which was the only treasure I dreamed might yet belong to me."

Florence interrupted him by a desperate effort. The tears almost trickled from her eyes as she said—

"I shall always think of you as my truest, kindest friend. And I hope you will be happy."

"Happy!" exclaimed Arthur. "That is now impossible. My only approach to it will be the knowledge that you sometimes think of me."

It was fortunate, perhaps, that they were at this moment interrupted. Arthur was even then wondering at his own self-command. He was marvelling that he did not

fling himself before her and pour out the burning torrent of his love in lava-words, in spite of gods and men.

And this might indeed have happened had not Louise suddenly appeared, advancing as it seemed, to meet them. She was alone, and pretended at first not to see them. Anon she quickened her pace and came up all smiles and suavity. It may be that this was [indeed the mere soft grass in which the serpent envy lay hid ; but, if it were so, the concealment was careful and complete.

“ We have all been looking for you,” she exclaimed, in her sweetest voice. “ What truants you have been ! You don’t know what you have lost. However, if you make haste you may yet be in time to get some greengages.”

“ My favourite fruit,” said Arthur, answering instead of Florence, in order to give the latter time to recover from any embarrassment she might feel. “ Come, Miss Lovell, we ought to press on with such an inducement before us.”

“ Let us go this way,” said Louise. “ You

evidently don't know much of this locality."

Louise now led the way along a narrow path, which went zig-zag towards the summit of the hill. In one part it bordered upon a steep declivity, from the top of which there was a pretty vignette sort of peep towards Godesberg and up the Rhine.

Florence stopped a moment to contemplate the view, and Louise and Arthur followed her example. This done they looked below them. On this side the hill descended abruptly, and for about fourteen feet the descent was sheer ; then there was a pathway running parallel to the valley, and below this the hill-side was a kind of steep slope dotted with shrubs and bushes and small trees. At the very bottom was a rapid rivulet, the murmur of which fell pleasantly on the ears of the spectators.

Suddenly Florence's eye caught sight of a rare fern growing a little distance over the edge of the descent. Quick as thought she knelt down and tried to reach it. It was a little lower than she had fancied.

"Louise," she cried, impulsively, "give me your hand. I want just to lean over and get this fern."

Arthur turned suddenly round. He had been looking another way, and had not noticed Florence's action.

"Miss Lovell," he said, almost peremptorily, for he was startled at the sight—"Miss Lovell, that is not at all safe. Let me get it for you."

"Thank you, I have made up my mind to get it myself. I don't like to be beaten when I have once taken a thing in hand, and I can so very nearly reach it."

"Then allow me to hold you hand, as I am stronger than Miss Bonngart."

"I am not so heavy as all that," said Florence, laughing. "I am sure Louise can hold me tight enough."

"No doubt," responded Louise, whilst a spectral smile flitted over her expressive lips.

Arthur was astonished at Florence's obstinacy. Perhaps it was really due in some measure to the peremptory tone in which he had at first spoken.

Before he could say more, Louise had grasped Florence's hand, and the latter was again bending over the descent. Suddenly, and just when Florence was for the moment beyond her balance, it seemed to Arthur that the hand of Louise relaxed and opened. Florence uttered a piercing shriek, and fell headlong over the brink. In another second she was lying apparently dead in the pathway below.

How Arthur reached her he never knew, but in a minute he was kneeling beside her.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, in piteous accents, "she is dead!"

Himself pale as death, he bent over the recumbent girl. He felt for her pulse, he listened for her breathing. Thank God! he could still detect both. His heart almost burst with gratitude; she was still alive—she might yet recover.

Water was what was now needed above all things. He would have rushed to the stream and brought it, but that he had no proper vessel. His hat, loosely woven of straw, would have let it escape, long ere he could

have regained his present stand-point. As he thus stood in perplexity, he saw beneath him a little cot close to the edge of the stream. In a moment he had taken his resolution—he would carry Florence thither until Louise should bring assistance. Where, by-the-bye, was the latter? He cast his eyes upward. She was not there; she had fled at the moment Florence fell, and was doubtless gone to seek assistance.

Tenderly and gently, as a mother lifts her infant, did Arthur raise the unconscious girl. Her figure was so slight and almost child-like, that Arthur could have borne it with ease, even had not the preciousness of the burden kindled in him an enthusiasm which was superior to fatigue. But he went slowly, partly because, for her sake, he was above all things careful that his foot should not slip, partly because, for his own, he could not find it in him to abridge that delicious journey. And as he went, he kept gazing with rapt eyes upon that pure, spiritual face, now so pale and calm, and on the long, silky tresses that hung in such rich profusion over his supporting arm.

How he longed for those eyes to open !  
How nervously he listened to her breathing !  
With what dismay he noted a little rill  
of blood trickling over the alabaster of her  
temple !

As he thus gazed, an overmastering impulse took possession of his soul ; but at first, in his nobility of sentiment, he shrank back from it as sacrilege. Then, as Florence's breathing grew more regular, and the tint of life began to return to her cheek, he could contain himself no longer. She will awake, he said to himself, and never, never shall I have another opportunity, and, with these words, he bent down his head and kissed her forehead.

He would not kiss her lips. The whiteness of his soul forbade the thought. He would kiss her only as a father might kiss a daughter, a brother a sister ; he would thus seal, in his own imagination at least, the pure immaterial bond that united their sympathetic hearts.

It was the physical sign and token of a great spiritual sacrament. Thenceforth, whatever distance might divide them, he would

yet feel that she was his—that the contract that knit their souls together was, as it were, complete and formal.

Only a nature such as Arthur's, at once poetic, religious, and mystic, can understand or appreciate the spirit in which he thus caressed the unconscious maiden. In death or life, he said exultingly, she is now for ever mine—mine by virtue of our mutual love—mine by the sacred seal that I have set upon it.

Florence herself, could she have felt and understood the kiss, would not have blamed the giver. It was so reverential—almost awful, as of one who feels keenly the mysteries of life and love—the solemn act of a priest, rather than the ardent impulse of a lover. Yet was it also above all things tender—tender with that delicate and unutterable sympathy, with which great souls vibrate.

It was but a few minutes before Arthur reached the hut. To his great joy, he found a woman in it. Hastily laying Florence on the bed, he seized a vessel, and rushed to the brook for water, entreating the woman

meanwhile to use every effort in Florence's behalf; but no effort now was needed. For some few minutes she had been no longer really unconscious, only rapt in that inertness of volition which so often follows upon unconsciousness. She had been, as it were, in a trance, in the which she had felt unable to move or speak, but not unable to note what passed around her; and now, at the first touch of the water, she opened her eyes, with a strange dreamy look, and said faintly :

“Where am I?”

“You are in this good woman's cottage,” replied Arthur, rejoicing unutterably at this speedy recovery.

What was it that made Florence's pale face glow with so deep a blush as she heard Arthur's voice? He himself could not imagine. She did not dare look him in the face, but closed her eyes again, and murmured faintly :

“Where is Louise?”

“I will go and look for her,” said Arthur. “Meanwhile,” he continued, turning to the old woman, “do you attend to this young lady.”

"The poor dear young creature!" exclaimed the worthy peasant compassionately. "I declare her temple is bleeding."

"Try if you cannot bind it up," said Arthur, and having satisfied himself that this wound was entirely superficial, he left the cottage to look for Louise. He met her almost at the door.

"Tell me," she cried: "she is not much hurt?"

"I hope not," answered Arthur, gravely.

"Thank God! I hardly dared to ask the question, I was so afraid she might have been injured."

"I trust no serious damage has been done," continued Arthur, more cheerfully. "She was stunned by the fall, but I am pretty sure no bones are broken. And she has already come to herself."

Could it be that the face of Louise fell as she heard this satisfactory diagnosis? Arthur almost thought so, but he banished in a moment the unworthy suspicion.

"Miss Lovell is just inside," he continued, "and will, I expect, be very glad of your

help. But where are the others? Have you seen them?"

"No; I have been trying to find a way down so as to come to dear Florence as soon as possible. No doubt they are at the inn waiting for us."

"I will go and tell them what has happened," said Arthur, "if you will take care of Miss Lovell the while."

"Certainly." And Louise passed at once into the cottage, while Arthur re-ascended the hill.

The soft breath of autumn fanned his face, but he felt it, heeded it not. The memory of a contact softer, sweeter, and more holy, lingered round his lips. His soul seemed to be streaming forth from his face in the saint-like expiration of love. That precious, albeit momentary, contact; that union of spirit with spirit, symbolized by the adherence of flesh to flesh, seemed to suck into itself the golden honey of a life-time by its concentrative force of superhuman feeling. All that made existence worth the having—all the juice, and sap, and focussed glory, and quintessential meaning of the mysterious "To Be"—had, at

least for that brief instant, swept in divine pulsations over his enraptured heart. What-ever now might come, the memory—the fact—of this would linger.

To him it was now allowed to say, in the supremest significance of the words, “I have lived. To-morrow, come storm or sunshine, it cannot make the past as though it had not been, undo what hath once been done, or render of none effect that which this fleeting moment to me hath brought.”\*

There, as he went his way hill-upwards, with this radiant light upon his face, and this divine glow about his heart, he felt that he was acting the allegory of his future. Life should thenceforward be to him a true “*Excelsius*”—a time of upward toiling and of earnest striving, whereto he was now inspired by the precious impulse of a sympathetic love.

There must needs be difficulties and dangers. Each further step in the hill-pathway of existence would bring its own. But now he was nerved, as with a new elixir, to confront them all—to trample the base beneath his feet, and to cling tenacious to the high

\* Horace, Carm : III, 29.

and noble—in the soul-knightliness that stirred within him at the recollection of that first, last act of holy, human worship.

He reached the summit of the hill by a long and winding pathway, which debouched almost in front of the inn. There, sure enough, were the other members of the party. They were sitting in the open air round a table, which was covered with the materials for a meal.

Something in Arthur's appearance must have struck them, for the instant they saw him they all started up in undisguised anxiety.

"What has happened, Herr Forn? Where is Louise, and where is Fräulein Löffel?" they exclaimed, in chorus.

Arthur had striven to conceal his emotion, but apparently without success.

"Do not be alarmed," he replied; "they are both well."

"Why did they not come with you?" asked Frau Bonngart.

"The fact is," said Arthur, forcing a smile, "Miss Lovell has met with a slight *contre-*

*temps*, and Miss Bonngart is kindly attending to her."

"A *contretemps*! How do you mean?"

"Nothing serious, I hope; but, in gathering some ferns, Miss Lovell fell over a rather high bank, and was for the moment stunned; but she is now much better."

"*Gott!* how shocking! Where is she?"

"She is now in a little hut at the foot of the hill, but you really need not be uneasy; she is almost herself again."

"We will go to her at once," exclaimed Frau Bonngart.

"Pardon me," said Arthur, "I think it might be better if the rest of the party remained here, and you alone were kind enough to go to her. There is no reason why the party should be broken up. I will just show you where Miss Lovell is, and will then fetch a conveyance for her as soon as possible, as she will hardly be able to walk home. It would be well, perhaps, to take her some salts and other restoratives from the inn here."

Arthur's advice was followed, and, whilst

the rest of the company remained where they were, Frau Bonngart made her way under his guidance to the cottage where Florence had been left. On their arrival they found her much better, and even talking of walking home.

Frau Bonngart lavished much quasi-maternal tenderness upon the patient, and was really relieved to find that her injuries appeared so slight. The wound on the temple turned out to be a very slight abrasion, and other positive injuries there seemed to be none.

"You have had a most merciful escape," said Frau Bonngart. "How did it happen?"

"I am afraid it was partly my fault," interposed Louise. "I fancied I was stronger than I am. My hand seemed to give way just at the important moment when Florence was depending upon me to hold her. I will never again undertake such an office."

"O, no! It was all my fault. No one else was in the least to blame," exclaimed Florence, smiling. "I was wilful and obstinate, and I have got my deserts. Mr. Vaughan warned me not to be rash, and when I would

persist he wanted to hold my hand, but I preferred to indulge my folly. And as to poor Louise, I'm sure she did the best she could. I am so glad I didn't pull her over!"

Louise tried to look grateful for this unselfish exculpation, but somehow her smile had a very bitter ending. It cut her to the heart to have her victim, or destined victim, be-lauding her kindness and goodness. It was like that grateful clause in her aunt's will.

Arthur said nothing, but went almost immediately to fetch the necessary conveyance. He was not gone long, and on his return, Florence was lifted with all care into the carriage, which then drove slowly in the direction of Bonn, Arthur riding outside and the three ladies within.

Arrived near Herr Bonngart's house, Arthur perceived two gentlemen standing at the door, seemingly in parley with the servant. One of them he had no difficulty in recognizing as his old acquaintance, Mr. Borrodale. The other was a tall, erect, light-haired man, of rather distinguished mien and

appearance, dressed in a tightly-buttoned frock-coat. Who this might be Arthur could not imagine.

"Here they are, sir," exclaimed Gretchen, as the carriage drove up.

The tall gentleman turned round quickly at the words, and strode rapidly to the carriage-door. A glance was sufficient. In another minute he had opened it, and Florence was in his arms. The stranger was her father.

"My dear, darling little daughter!" he exclaimed, kissing her over and over again, with almost a woman's tenderness. "How glad I am to see you! How are you? You look pale, dearest. Is anything the matter?"

Florence did not answer, but remained panting in his arms. Her accident and this new excitement had rendered her for the moment speechless. Mr. Lovell looked surprised, and cast an inquiring glance at her companions.

Arthur purposely remained silent, but Louise came to the rescue.

"Miss Lovell," she said, "has unfortunately had a fall, which has upset her a little, but there is nothing serious."

Mr. Lovell looked alarmed.

"Let us go into the house," he said, hurriedly. "Has a doctor been sent for? How did it happen?"

Louise repeated her account of the occurrence, whilst Mr. Lovell conveyed his daughter indoors, and laid her upon the sofa. Then he renewed his request for a doctor.

"Not a German doctor," he added, "for I could not understand what he said."

"There is an excellent English doctor near here, named Smith," said Louise; "shall we send for him?"

"Is there no American? I have such a dislike to the English."

Arthur was in the room; but it is only fair to add that he had not spoken, so that his nationality may not have been known to Mr. Lovell.

At this last remark, Arthur said, in German, to Louise—

"The only American doctor here is Dr. Thomson. He is rather young, but, I think, clever. Will you ask Mr. Lovell if he would like him summoned?"

Mr. Lovell was grateful for the proposition,

and Arthur sallied forth to fetch his friend.

The doctor soon came and made his diagnosis. As far as he could see, Miss Lovell had sustained no serious damage internal or external—only the fright and shock had caused a temporary derangement of the nervous system, which was evincing itself by a tendency to hysteria. This, however, he said, would soon pass off, with rest and quiet. Meanwhile, he wrote a prescription for a composing draught, and so took his leave.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE RUNS SMOOTHER.

“**A**ND so you really go back to England to-morrow?” asked Lessing of Arthur, when, later that same evening, the Englishman was paying him a visit.

“Well, perhaps not to-morrow, after all.”

“I am so glad. But what has made you change your mind? Your face was set as a flint towards England when I last saw you.”

“It would look unfeeling to leave just after Miss Lovell’s accident,” said Arthur, who had been giving his friend an account of his walk.

The American started up.

“*Eureka!*” he cried. “There can no longer be any doubt. I congratulate you, my dear fellow, with all my heart.”

Arthur's face grew a shade paler, and a deeper tinge of sadness settled upon it, as he answered—

“What do you mean, Ilty?”

“Why, of course, that there is something between you and Miss Lovell—that you are engaged, I daresay.”

“You are quite wrong,” said Arthur, still more sadly. “I am not, and am never likely to be, engaged to Miss Lovell.”

Lessing saw that the subject was painful to his friend, and, with his usual good-nature, dropped it at once. ‘Besides, he was full of his own affairs, and knew that he should find a sympathetic auditor in Arthur.

“I think *I* shall be leaving Bonn very soon,” he said.

“Whither away?”

“Also to England.”

“That will be very pleasant. We might go together. But how soon?”

“Mary goes home next Tuesday. When she and you are both gone, I shall no longer have any object in remaining here. There are no lectures now, you know, as it is vacation-time at the University.”

“It seems to have been vacation-time with you ever since I have known you.”

“Don’t traduce me. I have done a great deal of work, in an irregular way.”

“I would rather answer for the irregularity than the work. But, tell me, what have you been doing lately in the realm of Cupid?”

“I am the luckiest and happiest of men!” exclaimed Lessing, with a joyful impetuosity.

“A thousand congratulations! I guessed your luck would turn at last. Tell me all about it.”

“To begin at the beginning, Johanna must needs drop my first *billet-doux* on the stairs while she was sweeping them. She did not miss it at the time, and, when the dragoness next went to her room, of course it became her prey. She had the ungentlemanliness (I use the word advisedly, as no one could expect Miss Ross to have any ladylike qualities)—she had the ungentlemanliness to break the seal, and possess herself of the contents. This was awfully unlucky (*horresco referens*!) but it might have been worse. The dragoness never suspected Johanna of having had any

share in the business, and that, as you will see, was a great piece of luck for me. On the contrary, she fancied, naturally enough, that the letter had dropped out of Mary's own pocket, and that it had been conveyed to her somehow by my cousin. She accordingly sent for poor Mary, and showed her the envelope and the signature of my note—the contents, she said, were such stupid, childish—fancy, *childish*!—trash, that she could not permit her to read them. Then she demanded to know how the note had come into her house, and what Mary meant by bringing such disgrace upon all connected with her. It was in vain that Mary protested her innocence. The dragoness flared up in the most fearful fashion. Solitary confinement, bread-and-water diet, and other ingenious tortures too horrible to dwell upon, were threatened, and, I am afraid, to some extent inflicted. The like fate befell poor Sophy. Then came that masterpiece of strategy, to which I fell a victim. But (*Gott sei Dank*!) through it all, Johanna was not once suspected."

"And I suppose it was from her you heard all this?"

"Partly from her, partly from the person more immediately concerned," answered Lessing, with a smile of satisfaction.

"Then you have had an interview after all! Patience and perseverance——"

"It is rather a case of *amor vincit omnia*," interrupted Lessing; "but let me finish my account in a regular way. Of course I went to the cobbler's the Thursday after my adventure, and there met Johanna. Instead of falling on her knees and asking my pardon for the disgusting carelessness which had led to my misfortune, will you believe it, she had the effrontery to burst out into a loud laugh the instant she saw me?"

"What are you grinning at?" I asked, in my severest manner.

"It is too droll! It is too droll!" she exclaimed, and laughed again until the tears ran down her great fat cheeks.

"What is too droll?"

"O, sir, your making love to Miss Ross. We have done nothing but laugh at it ever since."

"And whose fault was it, I should like to know? How did my letter get into Miss

Ross's hands? Perhaps, instead of grinning in that idiotic way, you will be good enough to explain your conduct.'

"Strange to say, this speech seemed to amuse her more than anything, and it was with difficulty she could get out the words:

" 'I dropped it somewhere.'

"There was evidently only one way of bringing this stupid help to her senses, so I said to her in a quiet but determined manner:

" 'As you have not carried out *your* part of the bargain, I must insist upon your returning the Friedrich-d'or I gave you.'

"Snakes alive! Arthur, you should have seen how long her face became in one moment.

" 'I insist upon its being returned at once,' I repeated.

"At last she managed to say, that she hadn't got it with her, and of course it soon came out that it had all been spent. This was just what I wanted to hear, as it put her more into my power.

" 'Now,' I said, 'I not only will not ask you again for that Friedrich-d'or, but I will give you a second, if you will manage to take

another letter to Miss Martin. But this time, I don't pay until after the work 'is done.'

"Of course she was only too glad to consent, and, as I had the letter ready in my pocket, all was soon arranged, and I left the fair Johanna to enjoy the society of the enamoured cobbler."

"And what was in this second letter?" asked Arthur, slyly.

"Its contents were in essentials the same as the first, but rather more poetically expressed. I was able, too, to add what I had already gone through in my attempt to see her."

"And were you able to throw an heroic halo over *that*?"

"I flatter myself, yes. But, to proceed. I had to wait several days for an answer. At last I really did get one by post. It was written in quite a different hand to the other, in an equally pretty, but perhaps rather younger hand. I tore it open. It, too, was not very long, but it was like a drop of nectar to me. It was rather guarded in its expressions. It began, 'Dear Mr. Lessing,' and

ended, 'Yours truly.' But I knew that these words did not express Mary's real feelings, so much as indicate her natural dread of the dragoness. But the best of it all was, that she was going to stay in Bonn three or four days after the school had broken up, and at the house of my friend, Mrs. Brownlow."

"How was this?" inquired Arthur.

"She was to wait for a chaperone from Switzerland, who could not arrive before that time."

"And you have met her at your friend's house?"

"Three times, my dear fellow. Think of that! And, what was better still, we have been out once for a walk together—of course Mrs. Brownlow was with us—and we met Miss Ross and the bishop. O, it was too delicious! You should have seen her look! I believe she says, she could not think of receiving Miss Martin again as a pupil. I'm sure I hope it's true."

"And how has your suit prospered, now that you have really been able to press it?"

"Admirably! We are engaged," answered Lessing with preternatural solemnity.

"Engaged! So soon! And without any consultation of the parents on either side?"

"As far as *my* parent goes," said Lessing, "I am sure of his consent. My father has always told me to act for myself in everything, especially in the matter of marriage. He says it's the only way to acquire that feeling of independence which a citizen of the United States ought to possess."

"Perhaps, however, Sir Peter and Lady Martin may make some difficulty."

"About that I know nothing," answered Lessing, "but I hope not. You know them, however, don't you, and can speak a good word for me?"

"My personal knowledge of them is very slight indeed. But perhaps I can get at them through mutual friends, and, I need not say, that anything I can do for you I will. But, another thing—are you not both very young to marry?"

"Young! Why I'm past twenty, and

Mary is seventeen. My mother was only fifteen when my father ran off with her. Besides, I guess we shan't marry for a few months yet."

"A few months! you are indeed go-ahead in your ideas!"

"You seem sometimes almost to forget that I am an American," said Lessing, with lofty self-complacency. "We don't let the grass grow under our feet. But look here! I have something to show you."

So saying, Lessing pulled out of his breast pocket a small morocco case, which he opened and handed to his friend. It contained a likeness of Miss Martin, and, as Arthur could not but acknowledge, a most faithful and charming portrait. All the piquancy and coquettishness of the little English lady were reproduced with wonderful success, and Arthur did not wonder that she should so thoroughly have taken captive the susceptible heart of his friend.

"It is perfect," he said, returning it to Lessing. "You are indeed a lucky man. And that new locket at your watch-chain,

that comes from the same quarter, I suppose?"

"Certainly," answered Lessing, opening it, and disclosing a tiny lock of soft dark-brown hair.

It was indeed evident that Dame Fortune had performed a somersault in Lessing's favour. After much unlucky rattling of the dice, he had at last thrown the *Venus* upon the *tapis vert* of Life.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A BIT OF FAMILY HISTORY.

IT was not till the next morning at breakfast that Arthur was formally introduced to Mr. Lovell. He found him a cold dignified man, much more like an Englishman than an American, and in many respects the very antipodes of Florence. It was perhaps partly this, and partly the remembrance of the young wife who had died in giving birth to Florence, that made Mr. Lovell so devotedly attached to his only daughter. Arthur thought he had never seen an instance of such paternal affection. The father's whole life seemed bound up in his child's welfare, and his first anxiety about her accident had been really touching to witness. In this respect, however, Florence seemed to have suffered no serious in-

jury. In spite of all persuasion to the contrary she persisted in coming down to breakfast, at which, with the exception of an unusual pallor, she appeared to be quite herself. And even this pallor was exchanged for something more than the glow of health when Arthur entered the room. He had been up so late the night before that he was the last to make his appearance that morning.

Mr. Lovell remarked the blush upon his daughter's face. His own gathered a deeper cloud than usual. But Florence rose from the table, and, first shaking hands with Arthur, cordially and yet with some slight embarrassment said :

"Papa, this is Mr. Vaughan—the gentleman whose advice I ought to have taken yesterday, and who was so kind to me after my fall."

The last words seemed to bring a yet deeper blush upon the girl's cheek. Meanwhile, Mr. Lovell rose with much dignity, and extending his hand, said :

"Sir, I thank you much. Anyone who

does any kindness to my daughter is always welcome with me."

Mr. Lovell had never made such a civil speech to an Englishman before, and Arthur duly appreciated the compliment.

"My services," he answered, "were very slight, but happily greater ones were not needed. Miss Lovell seems, thank God, none the worse for the adventure."

"I trust not," said Mr. Lovell gravely.

With that all sat down to the table, and for a time the conversation flagged. Arthur could not but feel a certain constraint in the presence of the gentleman, whom Florence had described to him as such a confirmed Anglophobic, and Florence herself was fettered with certain memories, which, however delicious to dwell upon in private, acted rather as a bar to conversation.

"Had you only just arrived yesterday when we drove up?" asked Arthur at last of Mr. Lovell.

"Only just. Mr. Borrodale had been good enough to meet me at Cologne; and we came on here together."

"But why did you not tell me you were

coming, papa?" asked Florence. "I had no idea of it."

"I was afraid you might get nervous, Flo, if I were detained in any way. And, besides, I wanted the pleasure of surprising you."

"And where is Mr. Borrodale? He disappeared almost directly, did he not?"

"Yes; I daresay he thought he was rather in the way than otherwise, and I know he wanted to get back to Würzburg to-night."

"What a funny man he is!" continued Florence.

"He has his peculiarities no doubt, but one of them is to represent himself and all his countrymen as rather more ferocious than they really are. I daresay he has not tended to remove Mr. Vaughan's prejudices against us."

"I don't think honestly that I have any that need removing," answered Arthur.

"Have I, Miss Lovell?"

Mr. Lovell's face again grew dark. He would have preferred to hear that the young Englishman shared the usual antipathy of his countrymen.

"The fact is, Mr. Vaughan has no prejudices of any kind," said Florence.

"Then he is more fortunate than I am," replied Mr. Lovell, with a meaning accent which Arthur knew very well how to interpret.

Later in the day Mr. Lovell asked Arthur if he felt inclined for a stroll. The latter consented, and both gentlemen sallied forth in the direction of the Venusberg, as Mr. Lovell had expressed a wish to visit the scene of his daughter's accident. After some preliminary talk the American said :

"Mr. Vaughan, my daughter tells me you have been very kind to her, not merely as respects the accident yesterday, but also during the whole time of her stay at Bonn. I hope you will accept my best thanks for all this. I take this opportunity of expressing them, because Florence and myself leave Bonn for good the day after to-morrow, if she is able to travel, as I hope will be the case."

As he uttered these last words, Mr. Lovell eyed Arthur sharply. But the self-command of the latter did not desert him. A slight additional paleness was the only external sign of the emotion within. Besides, was it not, after all, much the same thing to be left as to

leave? And yet the news *did* somehow cause him a shock.

"Where do you think of going?" he asked at last.

"That is not yet quite settled. Probably we shall travel about for a little time, but we shall winter in some warm climate. It is absolutely necessary that I should do so. Ours is a consumptive family, and I have always been obliged to be very careful."

"But surely Miss Lovell is not consumptive?" asked Arthur, with more anxiety than he had intended to exhibit.

Again the American eyed him sharply.

"I hope not," he said; "but she, too, is delicate, and requires care. I daresay," he added, after a pause, "that she has often told you of my sentiments towards your countrymen?"

"She has," said Arthur, smiling.

"It may seem," continued Mr. Lovell, returning the smile, but in a gloomier manner, "that such a prejudice is unworthy of a man of sense. But really I can hardly help myself. I imbibed it with my mother's milk. It is hereditary in our family. You are the only

Englishman with whom for many years I have shaken hands, and I need scarcely say," he added, with a politeness which was evidently forced, "that I esteem myself fortunate in having made your acquaintance."

It was clear to Arthur that, in spite of this disclaimer, he was included in the general condemnation.

"Perhaps," resumed Mr. Lovell, "you would not object to hear the origin of this hereditary dislike. It will serve, at any rate, *pour passer le temps*."

"It would interest me very much."

"I am descended," said Mr. Lovell, "from a Yorkshire family—"

Arthur started.

"In which Riding?" he asked.

"The East. My grandfather was the eldest son of a man of large property. In early youth he had imbibed what we should call liberal, but what my great-grandfather, who was an English squire of the old type, called revolutionary ideas. The consequence was, they did not get on well together. At last my grandfather exercised his free will so far as to run off with his sister's governess, a

pretty, but penniless, Swiss girl. His father insisted that he should give her up, and on my grandfather's refusal, the old gentleman disinherited him, and drove him from his door. Under these circumstances, it became almost impossible for my grandfather to remain in England, and he emigrated, with his young wife, to America, shaking the dust of the old country off his feet, and making a solemn vow never to return thither. Almost immediately after, the war of Independence broke out. My grandfather took a prominent part in it. Every year had increased his hatred of the English. At last it so happened that, soon after his wife's confinement with my father, a party of General Burgoyne's soldiers made their way, after an engagement, into the house where my grandmother was, and, mad with drink and carnage, bayoneted her as she lay."

"Good God ! . How shocking !" exclaimed Arthur.

"The baby was saved by the cleverness of the nurse, but my grandfather never recovered the blow his wife's death caused him. He lived long enough to instil his own hatred

against the English into the mind of his son, my father, who handed it on to me. Can you now wonder at my prejudice?"

"And who succeeded to the family estates?" asked Arthur, evading this last question.

"They should belong to me," answered Mr. Lovell, bitterly. "I am the lineal descendant of the eldest son, whom a father's tyranny disinherited. They went to my great-grandfather's second son, and are now, I believe, enjoyed by his grandson. I have heard, too, that either the present or the late possessor was made a baronet for his political services."

Again Arthur could not repress a slight start.

"For the title I care nothing," continued Mr. Lovell. "I am a thorough American, and I despise all such distinctions. Neither do I really want the estates. My father made a large fortune, which I have increased. But the sense of injustice, in being disinherited, still rankles. And now you have my history. I hope it has not wearied you. And, if you cannot forgive my antipathy to your countrymen, at least you will for

the future be able to understand the cause of it."

"You have interested me greatly," said Arthur. "Certainly the early history of your family is very painful. I can only hope that in the future you may have less reason to complain of the English, and I trust you will not attribute to all the unfairness or the cruelty of a few."

Mr. Lovell said nothing more, but it was evident to Arthur that his antipathy, unreasonable though it was, was altogether too deeply-rooted to be eradicated by any amount of persuasion. He thought it best, therefore, to let the matter drop. At the same time he could not but feel certain that Mr. Lovell had some object in thus initiating him into his family history, and what that object was, Arthur was not slow to divine. Mr. Lovell evidently had some dim floating suspicion of a possible attachment between his daughter and the young Englishman, and intended thus to give the latter a hint of the utter hopelessness of anything of the kind.

The communication had raised other thoughts in the Englishman's mind, which

surprised him more and more the longer he dwelt upon them.

“I have heard something very like this before,” he said, “and the name is the same. It must be so. But how strange!—how passing strange! If this be true, it is a discovery indeed!”

But of Arthur’s fancied discovery more shall be said anon.

## CHAPTER VII.

### AN ABRUPT PROPOSAL.

WHEN it became known in Herr Bonngart's household that Florence was about to leave Bonn, there was only one person to whom the news was other than painful. This was Aunt Letty, who was not only fond of change and travel, but who rejoiced exceedingly in the stop that would thus be put to all the machinations of Florence's two suitors. For, though the worthy negress had to some extent favoured Theodore's pretensions, she had done so only by way of defeating the still more obnoxious suit of Arthur, and not from any approbation of the pretensions themselves. For Letty, though she was ignorant of the Latin formula, was well aware of the diplomatic value of the precept, "*divide et impera.*"

She liked to break up the enemy into as many sections as possible, and then play these sections off, one against the other. And in this case, with a sublime sort of fly-on-the-wheel self-importance, she fancied that her tactics had met with no more than their due meed of success.

To every other member of the family the approaching loss of Florence was a very serious blow. It is true it was felt in different regions, but still with a kind of uniform keenness. Herr Bonngart felt the stroke mainly in his pocket, but then this was his most sensitive part. Frau Bonngart felt it in the head, as it disarranged and, in fact, rendered abortive all her skilful diplomatic schemes. Theresa suffered chiefly in the spleen, as she thereby lost her most powerful auxiliary in the mental torture of her sister. And the seat of Theodore's suffering was in his long since captivated heart.

Poor fellow! he may have begun the quest of Florence more with a view to pecuniary than any other advantage, but his feelings had now caught the divine contagion of something nobler and higher. than this. The

engineer had been hoisted with his own petard — the would-be enslaver had become the abject slave. He now loved Florence sincerely and devotedly for her own sake. It is true, his was not a very deep nature, but what of feeling he had, that he had poured forth in its fullest profusion at her feet. And now she was about to leave him.

One thought kept recurring to his mind with fresh force at every repetition. He could not let Florence go without opening to her his heart, without telling her his love and entreating hers in return. What her answer might be, he scarce knew how to judge. She had been so kind to him of late, had seemed to enjoy his society so unaffectedly, that a vague, timid, almost bewildering hope could not but nestle in his heart of hearts. And yet so much was set upon the stake that the hand of the thrower must needs tremble. In the tumult of his soul he sought counsel and encouragement from his mother. It is true her hard, worldly nature rather jarred upon him in these days, but he pined for some confidential intercourse, and of this his secret his mother alone was fully cog-

nisant. She did not fail him as far as encouragement went.

"I am sure," she said, "you have but to ask. Faint heart never won fair lady. I am not a bad judge of such matters, and I am convinced, after watching her narrowly, that Florence Lovell is not indifferent to you."

"There is no time, then, to lose. She goes on Monday. How am I to get a private interview?"

"I will arrange all that. I will get the father to take Mr. Lovell and Mr. Vaughan for a walk, and will arrange also that Theresa and Louise shall be out of the way. Then do you only show that you are in earnest, and I am sure that you will be successful."

All was carried out as the crafty Frau had proposed. All the superfluous members of the household were, in some way or other, got rid of, until Frau Bonngart remained alone with Florence in the drawing-room. To them, after an interval, entered Theodore, looking very pale, but perhaps all the handsomer in consequence. In another moment Frau Bonngart had slipped out of the room, with wonderful swiftness and dexterity for an

invalid, and the young people were alone together.

Theodore felt, by one of those instinctive intuitions which men attribute to the influence of their guardian angels, that he must speak at once, or his courage would desert him. He had screwed himself up to a certain point, it would be worse than folly to bring on a reaction by delay.

"Miss Lovell," he said, in the German which she now understood sufficiently well—"Miss Lovell, I cannot tell you how sorry I am to hear that you are going."

Florence raised her great sea-deep eyes.

"You are very kind," she answered. "I shall be so sorry to leave you all."

Then she dropped her eyes again, whilst she began to feel an uncomfortable flutter at the heart. She had a dim presentiment of what was coming.

"Ah! Miss Lovell," continued the handsome student, in a low, musical voice, that made even his guttural language sound melodious to the ear—"you do not know how I feel at the thought of parting from you."

His voice trembled with veritable emotion,

and almost died away in the excess of his mingled feelings. Recovering it with a desperate effort, he burst at once into the core of the matter.

"I love you!" he cried—"you know I love you. I live only for you—I cannot live without you——"

Florence did not suffer him to proceed. She would gladly have prevented the avowal had he given her time. His love was too sacred a thing to be poured out before one who, like herself, was, after all, but an indifferent spectator. But his impetuosity had forestalled her invention.

"Theodore," she said, for she had got into his sisters' way of addressing him, "please to say no more. I shall always like you—but I can never love you in the way you mean."

"Why not?" he cried, wildly—almost fiercely.

Florence blushed, but she could not be angry. She had always thought that Theodore's attentions to her were the signs of a mere passing flirtation. Now, however, she could not doubt that he really loved her. And she pitied him—not in the vanity that

sets highly by itself, but in the sympathy that knows, by its own experience, what it is to love in vain. And, thus feeling, she determined to answer even that last unwarrantable question.

"Because," she said, whilst the blush deepened and she looked yet more closely into her lap—"because I love another."

"You do?" exclaimed Theodore, starting up. "Who is it that has thus murdered my happiness?"

There was still a good deal of the animal in Theodore, and Florence cowered for a moment before the sheer force of his impetuosity and vehemence. But she was cast in no common mould, and, recovering herself almost immediately, she answered in the same low but decided tone as before. "That is a question which you have no right to ask, and which I cannot answer." And she made as if she would leave the room.

But Theodore was now fairly maddened. It was not merely his rejection. It was this hated thought of a successful rival which drove him for the moment out of all semblance of self-constraint. He seized Florence

roughly by the wrist and held her forcibly back.

"You *shall* hear me!" he almost shouted. "I know who it is—it is that cursed Englishman who was hypocrite enough to tell me that he was not a suitor. But he was, and is, and you have hatched some cunning plot between you, and made me your victim."

As he still spoke the room-door was thrown open and Herr Bonngart, Mr. Lovell, and Arthur hastily entered. They had been driven in by an unexpected change in the weather. They stood still a moment astounded at the scene. Theodore had his back towards them, and even had he been fronting them, he would scarcely have noticed their entry so excited was he at the moment by the thought of his fancied wrongs. As it was, he gave them no heed whatever. Still grasping the girl's wrist he continued, in a bitter, vindictive strain—

"If you will not be mine, at least you shall never be his. If I die for it, you shall never bear the name of Vaughan——"

He would have said more, but, at this moment, Arthur rushed forward and, thrust-

ing himself between him and Florence, sternly bade him release her.

Theodore's eyes shot fire, and a fearful scene might have ensued, had not Herr Bonngart at this critical juncture laid his hand heavily on his son's shoulder. Theodore turned hastily round, and, seeing his father and Mr. Lovell standing behind him, grew suddenly ashamed of his own vehemence.

"What is the meaning of all this?" asked Mr. Lovell sternly.

"Ay, what indeed?" echoed Herr Bonngart, who was really very much in the dark, and who wished Mr. Lovell to understand the fact.

"Will you be good enough to explain your conduct, sir?" continued Mr. Lovell, striding yet closer to Theodore, and fixing his cold eyes upon the young man's glowing face.

But Theodore had now recovered himself somewhat.

"I have forgotten myself very much, I fear. But for the moment, I did not know what I was doing. I owe you, sir, an apology, and a still greater one to Miss Lovell."

The American cast a glance at his daughter,

who was seated on the sofa, pale and palpitating, for Theodore's conduct had greatly agitated her, and came to a rapid decision to say no more about the matter until he should have received Florence's account.

"It is very strange," he said. "I may have to demand a further explanation at some future time."

"Go to your own room, Theodore," added Herr Bonngart, with much paternal severity. Theodore obeyed with that German respect for a father's command, which it is to be feared an American or an Englishman in like circumstances would not have shown. It may be, however, that he was not sorry to have such a good excuse for quitting a very awkward scene, in which he felt he had made himself unenviably conspicuous. Herr Bonngart now thought it his turn to apologize :

"Herr Lovell," he began, in German, "I regret extremely that my son should have so far forgotten himself. He is generally very polite, and I cannot imagine what has happened to him to make him behave like this."

Mr. Lovell understood not one word of

this speech, but he guessed, from the Herr's somewhat abject manner, that it was meant as an apology. Florence, however, who had now recovered a little from the agitation, into which Theodore's rudeness had thrown her, answered for her father :

"Pray say no more about it, Herr Bonngart. Theodore has always been so kind to me, that I ought to be able to put up with a little impoliteness for once ; besides, I am sure he meant nothing by it."

With these words Florence rose, and, slipping her hand within her father's arm, said in English :

"Come, papa, I want to shew you something in my room, and to ask you how you like it."

Mr. Lovell still looked very grave and haughty, but he held to his resolution of saying nothing more in the matter, until Florence herself should have explained it, so, with a cold bow to Herr Bonngart and Arthur, he suffered himself to be led from the room.

"What's it all about?" asked the perplexed Hausvater, when Arthur and he were

thus left together. "What can be the matter with Theodore? After all I've done for him, and the example I've set him, it's really too bad of him to go offending one of my best patrons. He will yet bring down my grey hairs in sorrow to the grave."

Herr Bonngart's hair was already grey, but not with sorrow. As to the example, Arthur thought the less said about it the better. Neither did he feel called upon to suggest any explanation of the scene, though he fancied he understood it well enough, and felt his own heart dancing with a kind of melancholy joyfulness at the conclusion to which it seemed to point. But Herr Bonngart, though too dull to see very far, and too selfish even to make the attempt, was yet not without some ordinary power of observation and deduction.

"I almost think," he said, with a mysterious twinkling of his fat sensual eyes, "I almost think Theodore must have been making love to Miss Lovell. Young blood will be young blood."

Somehow the words, the tone, the eye-twinkling, all jarred disagreeably upon Ar-

thur's mind. He felt disinclined to pursue the conversation.

"No doubt Theodore himself can tell you all about it," he said, rather abruptly; and then, impelled thereto by his sense of fairness, he added, with an effort, "if he has been doing what you say, I cannot see that he is to blame for *that*, however much he may be for his subsequent vehemence."

"Pardon me, Herr Forn, he is more to blame for the former than even the latter," replied Herr Boungart, drawing himself up with an absurd stiffness and attempted dignity. "His first duty was to have consulted *me* in the matter."

"Young blood will be young blood;" and, so saying, Arthur left the room.

Florence really had something to shew her father. It was the writing-case which she and Arthur had selected together, and which had not yet been given to Louise. The fact was, the latter had not returned till long after her birth-day, and Florence had therefore deemed it desirable to keep the present for the anniversary of her "Name-Day," which was now rapidly approaching. Finally, Mr.

Lovell's unexpected arrival had caused the day of presentation to be once more altered. The writing-case must now be given as a parting *souvenir*.

Mr. Lovell turned over the proffered case in a very mechanical way, and then said, with a kind of involuntary equivoque :

"Very pretty, indeed !"

The words had really more reference to his own thoughts than to the article he was handling, as was evident from those that followed :

"Flo, tell me what all this scene was about ?"

"I daresay you have already guessed, papa," answered Florence, blushing. "Theodore—"

"What on earth makes you call him Theodore ?"

"I have caught the bad habit from his sisters," said Florence, with a smile.

"Well ?"

"Well, Theodore wanted to make me a kind of offer."

"The impertinent jackanapes ! And of

course you gave him as sharp an answer as he deserved."

"I declined his offer," said Florence gently, "and asked him to say no more."

"And what more did he say?"

Florence foresaw that the answer to this question would lead to some very untimely revelations. It was not in her nature to evade it, so she endeavoured to be excused answering it.

"I think, papa," she said, with a winning smile, "I shall ask you, as I did Theodore, to say no more on this subject."

Mr. Lovell pondered for a moment. He was not angry at his daughter's request. It had been proffered in such a coaxing, affectionate way, that a less devoted father might easily have condoned the slight want of confidence that it seemed to imply. But he was more than ever convinced that there was something wrong somewhere. He had heard Theodore's last excited words, in which his daughter's name had been coupled with that of Mr. Vaughan. He had already fancied that Arthur's attentions to Florence were not al-

together disinterested, and now his daughter herself seemed to have something that she wished to conceal from him.

It would have been easy for Mr. Lovell to break out into a rage, and to insist upon being told the whole truth. He knew that Florence would under these circumstances conceal nothing from him, but he could not bear to be harsh with her immediately after their long separation. Or, with at least an equal prospect of success, he might have appealed to her affection. But then came the question, was it well that he should press his interrogation? Was it well that he should force his daughter to commit herself to the declaration of some attachment, which was evidently an unwise one, and which would yet be infallibly the stronger for such a declaration? At present it might, after all, be only floating vaguely in solution in the girl's thoughts. If so, what a mistake to precipitate and crystallize it by injudicious questioning.

All this passed through Mr. Lovell's mind in a few seconds. He was a man of much self-control and not a little ability. He took his decision immediately.

“Well, Flo,” he said, with a smile, “I suppose an old father has no business to pry into these delicate matters. I have complete confidence in you in this, as in everything else. I only bargain that you ask my advice before you get finally engaged.”

Florence put her arms round her father's neck, and kissed him tenderly.

“What a kind, good papa you always are,” she said. “I will never do anything to make you unhappy—I promise you that—and there is no talk of an engagement.”

Mr. Lovell knew his daughter's candour too well to doubt for a moment that what she said was the literal truth, and this was no slight consolation. But not the less did he determine, if it were possible, to find out the exact state of affairs from some one else, and above all to quit the scene of danger at once.

He left Florence almost immediately, and went downstairs with the view of making preparations for starting the next day. On his way he met Louise. It may be that the latter had been watching for him; certain it is that she was the one who, of all others,

with perhaps the single exception of Theodore, felt herself most interested in the approaching departure of Florence. It seemed to her—and she gnashed her white teeth at the thought—that both the loved one and the hated one were about to escape her almost at the same moment. Was there nothing to be done in the interests of either Love or Revenge? Possibly it was not yet all over with the latter.

“Mr. Lovell,” she said, in the most natural way, “I hope Florence is better.”

“Better!” exclaimed Mr. Lovell, who did not know that Louise had from an inner room leading out of the drawing-room seen and heard what had so recently taken place. “She is no worse and no better than she was this morning, thank you.”

But Louise was not to be put off. The Stygian river of crime had now rendered her invulnerable to common rebuffs.

“I was so sorry for her,” she said. “It was very wrong of my brother. And I had warned him against it, because I knew how useless it would be.”

Mr. Lovell looked for the moment as-

tounded. Then, rapidly recovering himself, he said :

“ Miss Bonngart, I shall be really grateful to you if you can throw any light upon the occurrence. I am myself all in the dark, but you seem to know what has happened.”

“ Had we not better go into the study ?” asked Louise with her usual caution. “ There is no one there.”

They went thither. Mr. Lovell maintained a grave appearance, but he was inwardly pleased at the prospect that now presented itself of getting at the true bearings of the case. And, occupied though he was by this thought, he still found time to admire the classical, though now somewhat stern, loveliness of the figure that stood before him.

“ Now, Miss Bonngart,” he said, when the door was closed behind them, “ perhaps you will kindly enlighten me.”

But Louise thought it judicious to assume the virtue of reticence, even though she had it not.

“ I thought you knew all about it,” she said with apparent naïveness.

“ All about what ?”

"All about Florence and Mr. Vaughan."

"All about Florence and Mr. Vaughan!" repeated Mr. Lovell sternly. "What about them?"

But Louise now pretended to be alarmed.

"I have no right," she said, "to betray confidences."

"Excuse me, Miss Bonngart. It is not only a right but a duty. You will not, I am sure, decline to tell a father what you know about his daughter."

"Florence is my friend."

"You cannot prove your friendship better than by confiding in me. I desire her happiness above everything."

"Well, I must say I never thought this would be for her happiness."

"This! What?"

"You must really, Mr. Lovell, excuse my saying more. I should not have said anything, but that I made sure you were in the secret."

"What secret? For heaven's sake, tell me!"

"He is so much older than she is," pursued Louise, with calculating perseverance.

"Well, since you will not tell me," exclaimed Mr. Lovell, "let me tell you. My daughter is in love with Mr. Vaughan?"

Louise nodded her head, as if involuntarily.

"Tell me," continued Mr. Lovell, "is it so?"

"I must not tell," answered Louise mysteriously. "It is the common talk of Bonn, but it may not be true. At any rate, I do not wish to mix myself up in it."

"The common talk of Bonn! My daughter attached to an Englishman, and one old enough to be her father! Curses on him and all his countrymen!"

"Please to remember, Mr. Lovell, that I have not told you that it is so."

"No! But I am sure it is, and I am indeed miserable."

Mr. Lovell leant back in his chair, and seemed for the moment overcome with his emotions. Then, suddenly starting up, he said fiercely:

"Where is this treacherous Englishman—mean, deceitful, hypocritical, like all his countrymen?"

"He is out!" answered Louise, with a bold use of the imagination. It did not suit her that Arthur and Mr. Lovell should come to an explanation. "And if I might venture to advise you, I would recommend you not to speak to him."

"Why not?"

"I cannot tell you, but perhaps you may guess. My mother says that when there is no positive engagement, it is always a pity to bring matters to a crisis."

"And you think there is no positive engagement in this case?"

Louise shook her head significantly but would not speak. Her manner, however, was sufficiently convincing to Mr. Lovell, especially when coupled with the remembrance of his daughter's denial. And, angry though he was, her advice seemed to him to be sensible. Did she not, in fact, advocate the very course of action he had already resolved to take?

"Miss Bonngart," he said at last, "I cannot thank you enough for the indication you have given me. I respect your reticence. And I

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will take your advice. Florence and myself will leave Bonn to-morrow, and any nonsense that may have been going on will be stopped at once and for ever."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### SHORT BUT SAD.

TRUE to his purpose, Mr. Lovell started the very next morning with Florence for Mainz. Any private interview that might possibly have taken place between her and Arthur was frustrated by the vigilance of the young lady's father and nurse, in whose espial ranks Louise also enrolled herself as an auxiliary. All that Arthur could do was to accompany the *cortège* to the train. Theodore did not again make his appearance, but Herr Bonngart, his wife, Theresa and Louise, went to the station to speed the parting guests. All still regretted the loss very much, but Herr Bonngart's grief had already been mitigated somewhat by the extremely liberal manner in which Mr. Lovell had construed

the agreement subsisting between himself and the worthy German.

What the feelings of Florence and Arthur were, during those awful moments when the train was on the eve of starting, are rather for human hearts to feel than for human words to describe. Nothing but the most ordinary formularies of politeness were uttered on either side, but eyes spoke to eyes a language far deeper than that of the lips.

At last the train slowly moved out of the station. Arthur's gaze rested almost tearfully upon a sweet young face, and he was lost in the bitterest of meditations, when there burst upon his ear the words :

"Good-bye, sar, me no see yew again, me tink."

Arthur looked in the direction of the voice. A swarthy face, decorated with a malicious grin, was turned towards him from a second-class carriage. It was Aunt Letty, who thus relieved her long-pent-up feelings.

"Good-bye," answered Arthur. "I hope to see you again one of these days."

Aunt Letty shook her head as neither

expecting nor desiring the contingency. But the words fell like pleasant balm upon the heart of Florence.

That same day Arthur took his own departure. At first he did not go beyond Brussels, where he waited for Lessing.

The latter brought a piece of news.

"My old adversary in the duel," he said—"Theodore Bonngart—has come to great grief. It seems he is over head and ears in debt, and his father won't pay anything."

That same evening Arthur despatched a note to a trusty German friend at Bonn, begging him to arrange that a sum of three hundred thalers, which he enclosed, should reach Theodore Bonngart without any suspicion on the part of the latter of the quarter whence the gift emanated.

The next day the two companions started for England *via* Ostend.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A RAY OF LIGHT.

SOME months had elapsed since the date of the events last narrated, and much had taken place meanwhile. Lessing had been introduced, through Arthur's good offices, to Sir Peter and Lady Martin, and his suit had met with an unexpected amount of success. The fact was that, though he and his fair *inamorata* had been alike unaware of the circumstance, his father was the New York correspondent of the celebrated house of Martin, Petter, and Co., and was well-known to Sir Peter as a man of considerable wealth. Another event which had happened before Lessing's departure from Germany, but of which he did not hear until his arrival in England, had materially improved his position, though in

itself it was extremely painful to the young American. His elder and only brother had died on his return voyage to New York, whither he had been summoned on important business. This rendered Lessing in point of money an unusually desirable *parti*, and even Lady Martin, who had at one time been very anxious for a title, was now inclined to allow that such wealth as Lessing could bring was almost equivalent to the gold of a coronet.

Thus it had come to pass that the course of Lessing's love, however roughly it had run at first, was now on the smoothest and easiest of tramways. The only remaining difficulty—or rather *désagrément*—was that Sir Peter and his lady did not quite approve of the precipitation that characterized all the young American's ideas and proposals. They considered, in their good old-fashioned way, that their daughter was a little young to marry, and, by way of finishing her education, and ripening her for matrimony at the same time, they decided to place her for another half under Miss Ross's care.

That good lady, in spite of all she had

said, did not object to the charge, and Miss Martin was once more duly installed under her roof. This time, however, she went on a very different sort of footing to that which she had occupied before. In consideration of a considerable additional sum, Miss Ross consented to receive her as parlour-boarder—a distinction which, if it meant anything, meant that she should no longer be under the rigid tyranny that had been her portion heretofore.

As a corollary to this move on the part of Miss Martin, it happened that Lessing found it imperative upon him to continue his studies, and that Bonn was the only European University that seemed to suit his requirements.

But it was with Arthur that the world had moved most momentously during the interval.

He was staying with Lord Charles Granton in chambers in London, and the latter had had many conversations with his old friend respecting what he considered his over-scrupulosity. One of these may stand for several.

"And so I was right, Lovell," said Lord Charles, "and you are in love after all with your fair American namesake."

"Right so far," answered Arthur, "but wrong in thinking that it can ever come to anything. I am as much bound as ever, and matters are now drawing to a crisis."

"Obstinate man ! You are just as inflexible as your father, though in a different direction. Take my advice before it is too late. Break off your engagement with Miss Claxton ; indemnify her to any extent pecuniarily, and go in for a life of happiness instead of misery."

"There is but one answer—I cannot."

"Why not ? You do not love her, and is it not better to tell the truth before you marry, than to let your wife find it out afterwards ?"

"I do not think she would ever find it out from me. Though I cannot love her, I can treat her as if I did."

"Impossible. Women are sharp enough in these matters—much sharper than men—not that I think she would mind the discovery much, for she has an eye to your

future title and money more than to yourself."

"You go too far, Granton. I do not know that, nor you either. That I have been deceived in her is certain. She is not what I fancied—not what my young imagination painted her—but she may never have intended to give me a wrong impression. However, that may ere long be put to the test."

"How? What do you mean?"

"I mean that, if you are right in your suspicion that she wants me only for my money, she may soon be willing to relinquish me, for I am likely to remain a poor man to the end of my days."

"I do not understand you. The estates are entailed."

"True, but I have reason to doubt whether I am the rightful heir."

"You speak in riddles. Your father has no other son."

"No; but he himself is descended from the second son of his grandfather. This much I always knew, but I fancied that the first had died childless. There seems, however, good

reason to believe, from what I heard lately in Germany, that this was not the case. My great-grandfather's eldest son was disinherited."

"What if he was? How does that affect you?"

"Merely that the estates seem to me to belong of right to his descendants."

"You always were a perfect Don Quixote, Lovell, but this beats everything. You don't mean to say you seriously think of giving them up? Pardon me for saying it, but you are the only man on earth who would ever dream of being such a fool."

"I can do nothing whilst my father is alive, and I hope he may live many years yet."

"You would not be able to do anything after his death, if he could have his own way."

"No; there is no doubt he would disinherit me if he could."

"Shall you have full power over the estates when they come to you?"

"Absolute. The entail ceases with me."

“What a pity it is you and your father are still on such awkward terms.”

“It is very sad, but what am I to do? I cannot stain my honour by giving up Miss Claxton, and, as you know, until I do that, he will have nothing to say to me.”

“I cannot see why you should not give her up. It is done every day, without half such good reasons.”

“By every-day people,” answered Arthur, proudly.

“There speaks the blood of the Lovells! Well, I don’t know how to advise you. You are so obstinately and unnaturally virtuous. You won’t let me act for you, otherwise I don’t doubt we might get the young lady to listen to reason — that is, say, a compromise.”

“I must really beg that you will not interfere in the least. I know the kindness of your intentions, but this is a matter which must be left to the principals.”

“I wish ‘the principals’ would act, then. You will surely do something?”

"This is what I shall do. As you know, when I first became *désillusionné*, I told Miss Claxton, what was very true, that in consequence of my father's dislike to the connection, and the withdrawal of his allowance, it would be a very imprudent thing for us to marry. I also told her then that at the end of three years I should be ready to redeem my promise. I had a dim hope, I confess, that time and absence might induce her of her own accord to renounce the idea. This has not happened, and I have nothing now to do but to fulfil the solemn promise twice given."

"Is the time up?"

"Within a few weeks."

"And you have seen Miss Claxton since your return to England?"

"Yes. I told her that my father was, if anything, more opposed to the match than ever."

"And what did she say?"

"That it did not much matter, as the estates were entailed—that we could raise money on *post-obits*."

"She is a woman of business, then,"

said Lord Charles, with a good-natured sneer.

Arthur felt uncomfortable. He was in the habit of telling Granton everything, but it was painful to him thus to reveal the character of his *fiancée*.

"I have no doubt, then," said Lord Charles, after a pause, "that you have only to tell Miss Claxton of your scruples about your right to the estates, and she will not be so much indisposed to relinquish you."

"I must tell her that," said Arthur, musingly; "but I did not want to make it the instrument of breaking off our engagement. Heaven knows, I had no thought of such a thing."

"And I hope you have not now. If you have to choose between love and money, I must, as a man of the world, recommend you to stick to the latter."

"With respect to that," answered Arthur, decidedly, "I have quite made up my mind, that, if my suspicions are well founded, I will transfer it all to the heir of the elder branch."

"It is to be hoped you don't know where to find him," retorted Lord Charles, who was disgusted at his friend's wanton disregard of the commonest prudence. "I never heard of such folly. You'd much better give it to me, if you want to get rid of it. I am both needy and deserving."

"I do not see that, with all your merits, you are deserving of other people's money," said Arthur, dryly.

"Necessity has no laws. My necessity is, no doubt, greater than that of this unknown descendant of the elder branch. I only hope you may be some years in discovering who and where he is."

Arthur felt by this time almost confident in his own mind that he knew who this heir was, but he thought it best not to give utterance to his suspicions until he should have had an opportunity of proving their correctness. Soon afterwards the friends separated for the night, Lord Charles retiring to the light slumbers of a much embarrassed younger son, and Arthur to the horizontal contemplation of those perplexities which baffled him so entirely when in a vertical position.

He was, above all things, anxious to refer to the records of his family. But this was, under present circumstances, impossible. His father still absolutely refused to see him, until he should have broken off all intercourse with Miss Claxton. His engagement with her had been a sore trial to the ambitious old man. He had arranged in his own mind that Arthur should marry the only daughter of Lord Parlington, whose estates were contiguous to his own, and it was rumoured that the lady herself was by no means averse to the arrangement. It is true, Lady Laura Lysons, as has been said in a previous chapter, was by no means in her *première jeunesse*, and had never, even in her best days, been reckoned a beauty. And there were not wanting certain republican detractors of the aristocracy, who asserted that in temper her ladyship was the least trifle acidulous. All this Arthur's father knew, but what then? Was not the glory of the family beyond all such considerations? And how degenerate of Arthur to set his own private feelings in opposition to the duty he owed to his race!

Thus reasoned, with what he considered irrefragable justice, the old gentleman. Not, indeed, that Arthur's father was very far advanced in years. He was barely sixty, and still rode up to the hounds as gallantly as any man in Yorkshire.

Arthur knew his father's firmness too well to hope that he should have any opportunity of inspecting the family archives whilst the two remained on their present terms. And yet time pressed. Until he had cleared up the point respecting the elder branch, he knew not what to do. He could not tell Miss Claxton that he intended to give up the entire property, for his suspicions might, after all, prove unfounded. And yet in a very few weeks he must fulfil his engagement, with the chance of her discovering, at some future time, that she had married one who was almost a beggar.

Other men would have had no such difficulty. They would have both retained the property and got out of the engagement. To an ordinary man of the world there was not much difficulty in doing either. In fact, with regard to the first, who but a fool was ever

known to give up property to which he had the clearest legal title ?

But Arthur was not, in this sense, a man of the world at all. Had he been, he would never have become entangled with Miss Claxton. He would never have clothed for a moment a coarse-minded, though clever and handsome, girl with all the attributes of his ideal and then fallen down and worshipped her. This had arisen entirely from the inherent poetry of his nature. And, from the same cause, now arose the moral difficulties under which he struggled.

He passed a restless night. Towards dawn he had just fallen off into an uneasy slumber when he was awoke by a violent knocking at his bed-room door. He started up, threw on his dressing-gown, and hastened to discover the cause of the disturbance. On opening the door he saw one of the old retainers of his family standing outside. The servant was pale and excited, but seemed to shrink from being the first to speak.

"Well, Matthews?" asked Arthur, as a presentiment of evil shot through him.

But the old man still seemed struggling with grief and agitation.

"I hope you bring no bad news," continued Arthur, endeavouring to brace himself for the worst.

"Very bad indeed, sir—almost the worst!" gasped Matthews.

"Good God! What? Tell me at once, man!"

"Sir Charles had a fall yesterday with the hounds, and——"

"And what? Anything is better than suspense. You don't mean he is dead?"

"No, sir, not quite so bad as that, but very nearly. The doctor says he's got dis-cussion on the brain, and can't live."

Arthur's face assumed a livid paleness.

"Is he conscious?" he asked.

"He was not, sir, when I left. It was too late to telegraph last night, so I thought I'd come up myself by the mail and break the news to you, sir."

"Thank you—thank you, Matthews. When is the next train for the north?"

"In an hour and a half, sir," answered

Matthews, pulling an immense silver watch from his fob.

"Help me to pack, then, and we will go back together. My poor, poor father!—But stay, you are hungry and tired. I am afraid it is too early to get you anything, but come here."

So saying, Arthur led the way into Lord Charles's sitting-room. Sherry, biscuits, soda-water, brandy, and cigars were always to be found there, and in this way Matthews got some comforting, if not very substantial refreshment. He then helped his young master to pack.

"I hope it may not be so bad as you say, Matthews."

"Ah! sir, I'm afeard it's wuss," answered Matthews, with that vague pleasure in accumulating gloom which men in his station so often feel. It is one of the few luxuries in which they can indulge.

For the first few moments Arthur's surprise hardly left room for much grief. He had expected his father to live many years yet, and had fondly hoped that their long estrangement might meanwhile have come to

an end. That he should love his father very deeply and warmly was almost impossible. The former had always treated him with more severity than kindness, and, since the death of his mother, Arthur had met with still less consideration at his father's hands. But he felt a son's natural affection for the being to whom he owed his own existence; and this present blow was therefore a severe one.

Leaving a pencilled note on the table for Lord Charles, Arthur and the old servant left the place and made their way to the station. When, after some hours of travel, they drew near his ancestral home, Arthur noticed what an air of gloom and desolation hung about the place. As they drove up to the door the closed shutters and drawn blinds proclaimed the melancholy fact that Arthur's fears had already foreboded.

The old butler stepped forward to greet Arthur. His face wore an expression of no assumed sorrow.

"Is my father yet alive?" asked Arthur, in the touching words of Joseph.

The old retainer shook his head slowly

and mournfully. He said nothing, and Arthur did not inquire further until they had reached the library. Then he asked—

“Did he speak after the accident?”

“No, sir. He remained unconscious to the last.”

“And when did he die?”

“At three o’clock this morning, sir.”

“Where is he?”

“In his old room in the south wing, sir.”

“Thank you ; that will do, Ballard.”

“Won’t you have something to eat, sir?” asked the old butler, mindful, as ever, of the duties of hospitality.

“Thank you, I could take nothing now.” And Arthur bit his lip in the attempt at self-restraint.

The butler bowed and left the room. Arthur waited a few seconds until the retreating footsteps had died away in the direction of the servants’ hall, and then, with almost noiseless tread, took his own way towards the room where his now dead father was lying. It was three years since he had been within the house, and during that time

some slight internal changes had been made. A green baize door and an inner one, which was locked, now blocked up what Arthur remembered as the passage to the south wing. He had his hand on the door when a new footman, who was anxious to pay court to the risen sun, came behind him and said—

“Beg pardon, Sir Arthur, but that door is fastened. The way is now by the picture-gallery.”

Mechanically Arthur thanked the man for his information, but this first mention of his new title jarred terribly upon his feelings. He remembered how the butler, with more delicacy, had omitted it. He made his way along the picture-gallery and soon reached his father's room. The key was in the door—placed there, probably, in anticipation of his visit. Arthur turned it—swung back the heavy oak, and entered solemnly the chamber.

Already the body had been placed in a temporary shell, and had been invested with that awful shroud which renders death itself yet ghastlier. The old man's injuries had

been at the back of the head, so that, as he lay there with upturned face, there was nothing beyond the awfulness of mortality to shock the gazer.

For a moment Arthur stood beside the bed with folded arms and head bent upon his breast. He could not help noticing that he had never seen his father look so handsome, even in his best days, as he did now. Those grand, deep-cut features, especially that massive chin and firm, indomitable mouth, appeared yet more imposing in death than in life. Alas ! that they should still look so inexorable !

Firmly but gently Arthur stooped down and kissed the cold, white forehead of the dead man :

“Father !” he exclaimed, “you would have forgiven me, I am sure, but for your unconsciousness. Thus, then, I seal our reconciliation.”

## CHAPTER X.

### SOME IMPORTANT LETTERS.

SOME months later, in a garrison town on the east coast of England, three persons might have been seen together one evening in a small but prettily furnished drawing-room. Two of them were ladies—Mrs. and Miss Claxton—whilst the third belonged to the sterner sex. This last was no other than young Lord Moughborough, well known to the dowagers of the *beau-monde* as one of the best *partis* in England. That such a distinguished personage found himself in a small provincial town was due solely to the fact that it suited his lordship to remain a little longer in the army, and that his regiment was at the present moment quartered at that place. But, as he himself said, he ought to have gone into

the Guards, and then he would have been spared even this faint approximation to actual service.

Meanwhile Miss Claxton was turning his lordship's society to the best possible account. She was a tall, dashing, and very handsome brunette, by whom the whole garrison, from the puffiest colonel to the slimmest ensign, swore, and happy indeed was he reckoned, to whom Louise Claxton vouchsafed more than a distant bow. For Miss Claxton held that it was above all things foolish to make yourself, as she expressed it, "too cheap." The game of life required careful playing, and she had of late become very expert in its more recondite moves.

When, three years before, she, in the first bloom of her beauty, and by the exercise of no slight powers of tact and dissimulation, had succeeded in winning for herself the affections of Arthur Lovell, she and her not less designing mother thought she had not done badly. But of late the young lady had become more and more dissatisfied with this success. It was quite certain that Arthur's love for her had long since evaporated. For

this alone, it is true, she did not care much, but still it was one element in the calculation. Then she had discovered that her increased experience and almost undiminished personal charms, gave her a very good prospect of making even a better match. At this last she had been now for some little time aiming, and was prepared to throw Arthur over, the instant her efforts should meet with the success she hoped.

And certainly she had made wonderful progress with Lord Moughborough. His young lordship (he was just of age) was never happy when out of her society. His chief predilections were horses and dogs, and on these topics Miss Claxton would dilate with a copiousness and intimate acquaintance with the subject that never failed to excite the enamoured nobleman's wondering admiration.

She was, he used to say to his confidential friends, not only the handsomest, but the cleverest "gurl" (such was his lordship's pronunciation of the word) in all England. From this and similar speeches the confidential friends arrived at the conclusion that "little

Muffy" would "do something foolish," whilst Mrs. Claxton and her daughter entertained not unreasonable expectations of making a magnificent matrimonial *coup*.

Things were in this state on the evening in question and Lord Moughborough was enjoying the comfort of an afternoon tea with his fair enslaver, when there came a loud knock at the door. Immediately afterwards the servant entered the room followed by a gentleman whom she announced as :

"Sir Arthur Lovell."

"Confound it all!" muttered the young lord, twirling in an imaginary sort of way the most dimly adumbrated of mustachios—"that's the fellow she's engaged to."

As to Miss Claxton, she was far too experienced an actress to exhibit any signs of confusion. She extended her hand with some show of tenderness and said,

"So glad you've come, Arthur! I've been longing to see you!"

It may be that these words were spoken quite as much with a view of stirring the jealousy of her other suitor as of flattering the vanity of the one to whom they were

addressed. They certainly produced this effect.

"Seems very fond of him. Don't half like the look of it," muttered his lordship to himself.

"Lord Moughborough, Sir Arthur Lovell. Sir Arthur Lovell, Lord Moughborough," continued Miss Claxton, rather proud of being able to play off two such titles against each other.

The young men bowed. "Rather a fool I'm afraid," thought Arthur as he surveyed the babyish features, feeble mouth, and low forehead of the young lord.

"A conceited prig," thought Lord Moughborough, as, in spite of his viscountcy and twenty thousand a-year, he shrank back before Arthur's loftier bearing and more intelligent eye.

"The little one will suit me best," thought Miss Claxton, taking as usual a purely business-like view.

It was not long before Lord Moughborough took his leave, and, as Mrs. Claxton at the same time judiciously withdrew, Arthur and his *fiancée* found themselves alone. The for-

mer proceeded at once to state the special object of his visit.

"My father's death," he began, "has caused an unavoidable delay in the fulfilment of my promise."

Miss Claxton wished the delay could have been extended a little longer. It would never do to be altogether off with the old love before she was quite sure she was on with the new.

"I understood and appreciated your motives," she said.

"But now," continued Arthur, "I am prepared, as a man of honour, to fulfil my engagement."

The words were cold enough, and Miss Claxton could not resist saying, with a bitter smile,

"You speak of it almost too exclusively as a duty."

"There is nothing higher than duty. I am prepared to keep my promise, and to do for you all that a wife can expect from a husband."

This was much for a man to say who, as Miss Claxton knew, did not love her. But

not the less was she sure that he would keep his word, and that, however their union might lack that inner grace and bliss of perfect harmony between congenial souls, it would, in all other respects, be a happy one for her. She was almost minded to close at once with the offer. This was the bird in the hand, and not a bad bird either. She was just about to answer, when Arthur interrupted her.

"Before you reply," he said, "there is another thing that I ought to state to you. But do not, I entreat you, think I state it with any view whatever of thereby bringing about any change in our relations. I must state it, because it is a matter which concerns you as much as it does me. But I do not see why it need affect your decision."

Miss Claxton stared at this mysterious speech. Arthur continued :

"You may not be aware that I am not the representative of the elder branch of our family."

"Possibly not ; but what then ?" asked Miss Claxton, with much animation.

"That elder branch is not extinct."

“Well?”

“And I have discovered its present representative.”

“But how does that affect you or me?”

“In this way. I conceive that, though possessing the fullest legal right to the property, I have no moral right to it.”

“That doesn’t matter,” exclaimed Miss Claxton, who, in her intense worldliness, could not yet conceive at what Arthur was driving. “No one can dispossess you.”

“No,” said Arthur, quietly, “but I can dispossess myself—and I have!”

So saying, he drew from his pocket a deed of conveyance, duly signed and sealed, whereby all his lands, messuages, tenements, manorial rights, &c., in Yorkshire were made over to Herbert Lovell, merchant, New York.

“This,” he added, “I send out to Mr. Lovell to-morrow.”

“But this leaves you a beggar!” exclaimed Miss Claxton, gasping with indignation and astonishment.

"Not quite," answered Arthur, with a smile. "I have still the sum that I inherited under my mother's settlement, and on the interest of which I have been living for the last six years."

"A few hundreds, instead of eight thousand a-year!"

"I hope to add to it," said Arthur, making a violent effort, so anxious was he that she should not think that this conveyance of the property had been made with the view of bringing their engagement to an end. "I am, you know, a barrister, and I intend to practise."

"If you can get briefs," said Miss Claxton, with a sneer.

"Besides," continued Arthur, not heeding this remark, "I have still a rich uncle to whom I am heir."

"But there is no certainty in that quarter, is there?"

"No certainty; but I am a favourite with the old gentleman. If you are disposed for our union to take place, I will undertake that we have six hundred a-year to begin upon. That is not brilliant, certainly, but it will

be enough until my practice brings me in more."

It was an awkward time for Louise Claxton. Even now she did not wish to be precipitate. But she was ineffably disgusted at what she considered the childish scrupulosity of her suitor.

"You ought to have considered me," she said, "before you made up your mind to take such a step."

"I did," he answered, with no intentional irony. "But even that was insufficient. I could only say to myself: 'Duty before all.' But I swear to you again and again I did it with no view of changing our relations, and I do not see that it need. I know you did not take me for my money."

Arthur said this honestly enough, but it sounded like sarcasm to the lady. She answered tartly :

"Of course not, but one can't live without money."

"We shall still have enough to live on," said Arthur, pleading with forced earnestness

a cause which he all the time could not but hope and pray would be the losing one.

"Well," said Miss Claxton after a pause—"the news is so startling that I hardly know what to say. I must consult my mother. Our engagement has already been a very long one."

"I know it, but I do not see why it should not now come to its proper termination. I am ready to do my part."

This he said in the nobility of his soul, but it cost him a fearful pang thus to press his suit. And the sweet face of Florence seemed to rise before him, as if in rebuke for this apparent unfaithfulness.

But he was pleading with one on whom much greater earnestness would have been wholly thrown away. Miss Claxton had by this time pretty well made up her mind that such a poor deluded visionary would not do for her, but it seemed to her hardly proper to say so on the spot. So she repeated,

"I must talk it all over with mamma."

"And when will you let me know?" asked Arthur, with an eagerness which was genuine, though hardly springing from the

source that Miss Claxton might have supposed.

“To-morrow. Where are you staying?”

“At the Queen’s. I will come round again in the morning to see you.”

So saying, Arthur took a tolerably affectionate farewell of the young lady, and left the latter to her meditations. Their result may easily be guessed. And a consultation with her mother only tended to confirm her in her decision to have no more to do with a man who, besides being in her estimation a fool, had only six hundred a-year wherewith to gild his folly.

Before Arthur was up next morning the waiter brought him a note, which he had the satisfaction of reading in bed. It was from Mrs. Claxton, and ran thus :

“DEAR SIR ARTHUR,

“MY daughter has told me the nature of your interview with her yesterday afternoon, and she has consulted me very properly as to what she should do under these altered circumstances. As a mother, I have my daughter’s real interests alone at heart,

and I have felt it my duty to tell her that, however painful it may be to you and her, all further intercourse between you must from this time cease.

“I do not doubt that in what you have done you have acted from motives which do you honour, but the result is one very unfortunate for my daughter. It would be absurd to continue an engagement, which could not for many more years, if at all, lead to a union, (for to marry on six hundred a-year in the present day is a simple impossibility,) and, therefore, no choice is left but to break it off.

“My daughter feels the blow very keenly, and it will be better, therefore, that no parting interview should take place.

“In much sorrow, I remain,

“Dear Sir Arthur,

“Yours truly,

“EUPHEMIA CLAXTON.”

To say that Arthur was not pleased at the receipt of this communication, would be distinctly untrue, and yet his pleasure was not unmingled with a feeling of pain engendered of his over-sensitiveness.

“Have I done all I could,” he kept saying to himself, “to prove to her that *I* had no wish to break off the engagement?”

However the matter was now settled, and Arthur had no further business to detain him in the country. He accordingly took the cars that same day to London, and once more established himself with his old friend Granton.

It was in vain that the latter had attempted to dissuade him from relinquishing his property. On this Arthur's mind was steadfastly set. He had discovered, after his father's death, that what Mr. Lovell had told him at Bonn was strictly true, and further inquiries, conducted by a celebrated legal firm at New York, had proved unmistakably that Florence's father was the eldest and indeed only (Florence herself excepted) lineal descendant of the son disinherited by Arthur's great-grandfather. To him, therefore, Arthur, having discovered his present address by inquiry at New York, caused the deed of conveyance to be transmitted enclosed in the following note :

“Blackamore Buildings, Lincoln’s Inn.

“SIR,

“Acting under instructions from our client, Sir Arthur Lovell, we have the honour to transmit herewith a comprehensive deed of conveyance, by which he conveys to you in fee-simple all his real property in Yorkshire of whatever kind. You will perceive that no restriction of any sort is attached to this transfer. It is absolute and unconditional.

“Sir Arthur has informed us, in answer to our inquiries respecting the motive for such a very unusual, if not unprecedented step, that he has recently discovered that you are the lineal descendant of the eldest branch of his family, and, as such, entitled to the estates.

“Any instructions you may favour us with as regards the future management of the property, (a description and the last rent-roll of which are also enclosed), will receive the best attention of

“Your very obedient servants,

“HASSALL, SIMPKINS, & SOWERBY.

“H. Lovell, Esq.,

“Mentone.”

When this letter had been duly despatched, Arthur felt easier in mind than he had done for a long time past. He seemed now at last in all senses of the word a free man—free from the moral burdens that had pressed so heavily upon him. He had never ceased to think of Florence, and now at last some glimmer of light seemed to be dawning upon him. At the moment his delicacy forbade him to attempt to prosecute his suit. He would not go with eight thousand a year in his hand as the price of her father's compliance. He would wait until Mr. Lovell should have taken possession of the estates. He had not given them up as a bribe to him, any more than as a means of extricating himself from his previous engagement—he had done it as a simple matter of justice.

It was not very long before an answer arrived from Mr. Lovell. Arthur's lawyers brought it to him at once. If they had been surprised at the Englishman's quixotic magnanimity, they were not less astonished at the American's self-denial.

“I have not,” the letter said, “the honour of being acquainted in the slightest degree

with Sir Arthur Lovell. In fact, I know hardly anyone in England, and have always avoided Englishmen ; but his conduct fills me with admiration. I believe there is little doubt, from the description of the property you have sent me, that it is the same as that of which my grandfather, also named Arthur Lovell, was unjustly disinherited. But under no circumstances could I be induced to take possession. First, because I am already a rich man, and do not want it ; secondly, because I should feel degraded in my own eyes if I did anything to impoverish one who has shown himself so truly noble-minded as Sir Arthur Lovell. I beg you to assure him of my grateful appreciation of his conduct, and to express the hope that I may ere long have the honour of knowing him personally. It is not likely that I shall be able to come to England, as the state of my daughter's health renders such a long journey undesirable ; but, if Sir Arthur should ever be travelling abroad, I shall esteem it a high honour and a great privilege to make his acquaintance, and to claim the cousinship that there seems no doubt exists between us.

"The documents you were good enough to send me are herewith returned.

"I remain, &c., &c.,

"HERBERT LOVELL.

"Messrs. Hassall, Simpkins, & Sowerby."

The first feeling of Arthur when he read this letter was one of unaffected disappointment at Mr. Lovell's refusal. This, however, was soon chased out of his mind by the ominous paragraph respecting Florence. Come what might, he must go and see her at once.

That same afternoon a letter reached him from Lessing. It was written in the highest spirits, and contained, amongst many other passages, these following, with the first of which the letter indeed began :

"Come, my dear Arthur, at once, or sooner." 'Two forty's the word.' "My father's here, and Sir Peter and Lady M., and the governor has managed to get the consent of Sir P. to our (that is Mary and me) being married at once. Fancy, at once ! That is on Thursday next. We've fixed it so suddenly, because my governor must go

back to America almost immediately, and of course he wants to be present. Mind you come! You gave a solemn promise you'd be present at my wedding, even if it took place in Timbuctoo. I'll never forgive you if you don't turn up in time. You'll just do it. Start the instant this reaches you, and you can be in Bonn by Wednesday night. You'll laugh when I tell you who's going to marry us, but I shall keep that a secret till we meet.

"Theodore Bonngart has gone to America. Some say he's in love with an American lady, and hopes to meet her there, just as men go into one regiment to be near their brothers in the next. I expect it was really to avoid this compulsory military service here. At any rate, he paid all his debts before he left. Of course you have long since heard that poor Herr Bonngart is dead? Died almost directly after you and my fair countrywoman left—out of vexation at losing two such good payers, his enemies said—but the doctor's account was apoplexy.

"But the oddest thing is, Theresa is married. Married to a wonderful man—a count,

a member of all sorts of learned societies—a *rara avis*, in fact. They say he is her first love come back. I don't know about that, but I do know that the count is nearly sixty to look at, and that Theresa was left a very comfortable income by her father (who, you know, was a great miser), which will be increased on the death of her mother, an event that everybody is now expecting, as the old lady has taken most vigorously to Schnapps.

“As to Louise—the handsome one—she's gone off frightfully. As pale, and thin, and faded as a ghost. No one talks of marrying her, though she's still got the fortune her aunt left her. She and her mother live in the old house in the Coblenzerstrasse.”

There was much more in a similar vein, and Arthur's resolution was soon taken. He would start for Mentone, *via* Bonn (a round-about way, certainly), and stay just one day in this latter place, to redeem his promise to Lessing. Lord Charles, always ready for a change, resolved to accompany his friend, and the two started by an early train the next morning.

At the London Bridge Station Lord Charles bought a *Times*. All at once he gave a little exclamation of surprise, and, without saying a word, handed it to Arthur, pointing at the same time to the notice that headed a certain list in the first column. Arthur, too, could not help starting as the following paragraph caught his eye :—

“ On Wednesday, the 15th instant, at Hargate, by special license, the Viscount Moughborough, 153rd Rifles, to Louise, only daughter of the late James Claxton, Esq., R.N.”

Verily Miss Claxton had not allowed the grass to grow under her pretty feet.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE EVE OF MATRIMONY.

THAT the approaching nuptials of Lessing and Miss Martin created a great stir in Bonn, is a fact that hardly requires to be mentioned. It was not often that the good citizens or the needy colonists of that city of the Muses were provided with so interesting a theme for gossip. The wealth of both bride and bridegroom, which really was not inconsiderable, had been magnified by the tongue of rumour, until some people almost seemed to think that the approaching wedding was as if a Rothschild should marry a Baring. Then the youth and the good looks of the betrothed tended to make them still more interesting. In addition, it was already well-

known that, though the gentleman was a republican, an air of aristocracy would transfigure the occasion. The bride's parents were titled, and this, amongst the Germans, was taken to mean noble. Then it was rumoured that a bishop, who was also a lord, would perform the ceremony. Finally, at the eleventh hour, tidings got wind that two English noblemen, friends of the bridegroom, were on their way from England expressly to honour the auspicious event with their presence.

All this raised the excitement of the good folks of Bonn to the very highest pitch, and, for several days before that fixed for the wedding, few other topics found room for more than a passing allusion in the mouths of the hydra-headed.

Arthur and his companion arrived without adventure on the Wednesday evening, and Lessing, being apprised of their arrival, soon paid them a visit at their hotel. The young American was evidently quite equal to the occasion, and did not seem to be at all crushed by the impending burden of matrimony.

"To think," he exclaimed, "that *I* should be the first to enter this holy state! So much younger than you!"

"That accounts for it," said Arthur, smiling. "If you were a few years older, you'd know better."

"Just so," added Granton; "but one never knows what's best until it's too late to do it."

Arthur called for some champagne. The host of the "Silver Moon" brought it, with much humility, in person, and charged for it at the rate of a guinea a bottle—seven shillings of which was for the wine, and fourteen a delicate compliment to the title of baronet.

"A bumper to to-morrow's youthful bridegroom!" cried Arthur.

The impromptu toast was drunk with due honours.

"A thousand thanks to the venerable bachelors!" replied Lessing. "And may they soon see the error of their ways," he added, drinking a bumper in his turn. "I can't stay long," he continued, "I have so much to do. Neither my tailor nor my boot-

maker has yet brought me my things for to-morrow."

"It bids fair to be a case of beauty unadorned, then," said Arthur. "By the way, who's your bootmaker now?—not the revolutionary cobbler to whom Johanna was engaged?"

"No; he was patronized for a specific reason, which now no longer exists. Though for that matter, the poor wretch wants patronage more than ever."

"Why?"

"He's married Johanna."

"*“ Mutatis mutandis de te fabula narratur !”*

Why call him a wretch, seeing that you are in the same condemnation?"

"I referred to his poverty alone, which, in his case, is of course increased by matrimony."

"By-the-bye, Lessing, who ties the knot to-morrow? You didn't tell me in your letter."

"You'd hardly guess—my old enemy the Bishop of British Something-or-other; and—just think of it!—Miss Ross volunteered and entreated to give the breakfast."

"I can't believe that," said Arthur. "Or you must have wronged her grossly in your former descriptions."

"Well, I ought to add, it turned out that by giving the breakfast, she only meant lending her house for the purpose."

"That is more credible a good deal. And is this to be the arrangement?"

"Yes, I believe so. Of course Sir Peter pays for everything. Miss Ross is as much an old cat as ever, but she's tucked in her claws wonderfully of late."

"And the bishop?"

"Tried to give me his blessing. I didn't mean to be rude, but I didn't quite understand him when he wanted to put his hands on my head. 'Take care of the Macassar!' I said, quite innocently, but it seems to have put him out. At any rate, he muttered something, in which I caught only the words, 'God bless,' and 'hair.'"

"You supplied the aspirate, I expect," said Arthur—"the bishop probably said *heir* not *hair*—'heir of perdition,' or something of that sort."

"Ah! that's mere spiteful envy at my

approaching happiness. Well, I'm in my old quarters, Arthur. Mind you come round to-night when you've taken as much champagne as is good for you. I want to introduce you to my father. And besides, you are to be my best man. And now to rout up those wretched tradesmen!"

So saying, Lessing departed in such exuberant spirits that Arthur and his companion could hear him humming to himself all the way to the front door, whither the host, who knew him very well by sight, accompanied him, much to the gratification of Lessing's innate sense of self-importance.

"I never saw a fellow bear it so gamely," observed Lord Charles, when the young American had withdrawn.

"It's his youth that does it," answered Arthur in the same vein. "He's a mere thoughtless boy. I don't suppose he's one-and-twenty yet."

At this moment a new guest, evidently fresh from the train, entered the room. A glance sufficed to show Arthur that it was Mr. Borrodale. It cannot be said that the former, with all his fondness for Americans, admired

this specimen of the race, but, at the same time he always derived some amusement from studying the grotesque. And he was by this time aware that Mr. Borrodale was not in reality quite so black as he was pleased to paint himself. He advanced therefore towards him and held out his hand.

"An unexpected pleasure, Mr. Borrodale."

"The same to yew, sir!" answered the consul with a somewhat confused politeness. "I did not anticipate the felicity of this interview."

"Permit me to offer you a glass of champagne," continued Arthur.

This was a kind of invitation which Mr. Borrodale never declined.

"Wal, I guess as yew're so kind I'll not refuse to liquor-up."

Arthur poured out a foaming bumper. Then he said, "Allow me to introduce you, gentlemen. Lord Charles Granton, Mr. Borrodale, consul at Würzburg."

"*American* consul," suggested Mr. Borrodale, who was not at all overcome by the vicinity of a live lord.

“I beg your pardon—American consul. Mr. Borrodale, Lord Charles Granton.”

“I guess yew’ll be here on business, Mr. Vaughan?”

Arthur made an almost imperceptible sign to his companion not to betray him. He did not wish the American to become possessed of the secret of his transformation until he had had his interview with Mr. Lovell. It was true that Mr. Borrodale might see his real name in the *Fremdenbuch*, but then that might not happen until after post time, when it would be too late for the American to write the news to Mentone, and there was besides a good chance that even if he saw the name, he would not suspect that Sir Arthur Lovell and Mr. Vaughan were now convertible terms. So Arthur answered :

“No ; I am here entirely on pleasure. I have come for my friend Lessing’s wedding.”

“So ! I had forgotten he was a friend of yewrs. Thet’s what I’ve come for.”

“A very enterprising young fellow,” said Arthur.

“A born American, sir—thet’s what he is—a born American. I guess it’s only in the

Land of Freedom a man learns to go to work so slick as he's done."

There was an indefiniteness about the adjective "slick," which made Arthur doubtful how to continue the conversation. At last the subject always uppermost in his mind came to his aid, and he inquired with a tolerably successful attempt at nonchalance, but at the same time with some abruptness,

"Have you heard anything of the Lovells lately? Are they still at Mentone?"

"No, sir, they air not. They air at Homburg. But if yew've still any thoughts in thet quarter, I guess yew han't much chance, sir. Old Lovell is as strong against Britishers as ever."

Arthur felt ineffably disgusted. Lord Charles stared contemptuously. It was an awkward moment. Arthur did not know whether to regard the remark as a mere piece of transatlantic "pumping," or as indicating a definite suspicion. He could think of no better way of turning the current of Mr. Borrodale's thoughts than by saying—

"Have some more wine?"

The worthy consul was nothing loth. He did not guess what coals of fire Arthur thus heaped upon his head. And, in his appreciation of the wine, all else was for the moment forgotten. One advantage, at any rate, Arthur had derived from the conversation. He had learnt the present abode of Mr. Lovell and his daughter. One day's journey would enable him to reach Homburg.

The trio soon after separated, Arthur to visit Lessing, and the other two to sleep off the fatigues of their journey.

The young American was expecting his friend. He started up as Arthur entered.

"Welcome, old fellow, in the old rooms!" he exclaimed. "Let me introduce you to my father."

Arthur turned round and found himself face to face with a gentleman who seemed to possess all Mr. Borrodale's "'cuteness," with some of that worthy's peculiarity of manner. He was evidently, as the consul had described him, a self-made man.

"Proud to make yewr acquaintance, Sir Arthur," he said. "I have often heard of yew from Ilty."

"Ah! I knew him better as Arthur Vaughan. But he's none the worse for a title and—how many thousand dollars a year is it, Arthur?"

The latter evaded the question, as not wishing to seem to boast. "Enough to give you venison and champagne whenever you honour me with a visit, Ilty."

"You'll see a great deal of me, I promise you, on those terms. But now to business. What do you think of my wedding suit?"

It was indeed resplendent. Light fawn-coloured trousers, exquisitely cut, spotless white waistcoat, and superfine very dark blue Saxony cloth coat left little to be desired on the score of taste.

Arthur expressed the due amount of enthusiasm.

"It's the neck-tie that bothers me most," continued the young American, plaintively.

"You should have had Granton to advise you on that point. He is a much better authority on such matters than I am."

"One can't disturb him in his beauty-sleep even for that, I am afraid."

"Well, I will try to supply his place as far as I can. What's the difficulty?"

"Why, that it ought to contrast both with the coat and waistcoat."

"That's a theoretical difficulty entirely," answered Arthur. "Anything contrasts with white. You may eliminate the waistcoat from the question. Now, what contrasts best with a blue so dark as to seem in this light almost black?"

"Yaller," suggested Mr. Lessing, senior, whose own style of dress was based upon a respectful imitation of some stuffed cockatoos, which he always kept as models in his bedroom.

"Or green," said Arthur, mischievously.

"It's too bad to 'chaff' a fellow on his wedding eve, but never mind. After to-morrow I shall take such precedence of you that you won't dare do it. So I ought not to grudge you your last chance."

"Seriously," resumed Arthur, and he spoke with a gravity befitting the occasion, "you must, I think, give up the idea of a contrast between the coat and neck-tie. That between the coat and waistcoat will be sufficient.

You should wear a neck-tie of exactly the same colour and shade as the coat, with perhaps a few white spots in it. Then your *tout-ensemble* would be perfect."

"I do believe you are right. Thank you immensely. And you think the boots will do?"

"They may 'do,' but your feet will 'suffer,'" answered Arthur, examining with unfeigned astonishment the smallest pair of patent leather boots he had ever known to belong to an adult male. "You don't mean to say you are going to get into these?"

"Only just during the ceremony. I think I can stand them for that time. You know all Bonn will be examining my feet, and I want to leave a good impression behind me."

"Where are you going for your wedding tour?"

"Switzerland at first. After that I hardly know. It's the wrong time for Italy. But I suppose we must go to America very soon and settle."

"The idea of *your* 'settling' seems such a

joke. How have you managed to fix such an early day for the wedding and to get it to take place at Bonn too?"

"I have to thank my father for all that," answered Lessing, magnanimously. "Sir Peter and Lady Martin were on their usual summer tour just when my father arrived. He went at them tooth and nail: said he had left America on purpose to attend the marriage, but found he must go back almost immediately; that marriages were always made much earlier in our country; that there was many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip, and that no further delay ought to take place. O, he fought my battle famously!"

The elder Lessing listened to his son's eloquent laudation with much silent satisfaction.

"And what did Sir Peter say?" asked Arthur.

"O, Sir Peter was reasonable enough. It was Lady Martin that made the difficulty. Unheard-of thing! Much too young! No time to prepare anything—you know the style."

"But you prevailed over even this opposi-

tion?" asked Arthur, turning to Lessing's father.

"Yes, sir. I'm in the habit of sticking to me point, and the consequence is, I generally carry it," replied that gentleman, who, like his son, suffered from no excess of modesty.

"Well, I'm sure I congratulate you both most heartily."

There was much more talk on many knotty points, and, when at last Arthur left, it was past one o'clock. Yet, so pleasant and balmy was the night, that he still felt disinclined to go direct to bed. So he strolled up the street and wandered for a while into the country now bathed in soft lustrous moonlight.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A COUPLET OF MARRIAGES.

THE English Church in the Universitäts-Gebäude at Bonn was worth seeing on the Thursday morning of Lessing's wedding. All the lower part was crowded and even the huge galleries had many occupants. The whole English colony, with the exception of General Havercorn, who was a martyr to the gout, and Mr. Littleton, whose solitary pair of pantaloons was unfortunately at the tailor's, were there in radiant attire. Besides the wedding party, there were the Hockleyholes—the *crème de la crème* of the high English society, of whom it was even reported that they had meat three times a-day—and the Honourable Fitzjenkineses, who were rumoured not to have it once. The Spinnerstrasse turned out in

great force, proud of having produced the bridegroom. The *soi-disant* Cavendish, who extracted corns—the two gentlemen, who gave English lessons *pures et simples*, together with the third, who, by way of outbidding them, threw in the Latin Grammar—the English who lived there to be educated, as well as those who educated to live—all these had found their way into the sacred edifice. Then all the *haute noblesse* of the Germans, together with a fair sprinkling of the *bourgeoisie*, including most of Lessing's tradesmen, that is to say all the tailors and two-thirds of the bootmakers of Bonn, together with several high municipal authorities, with titles too long to reproduce except in an appendix, had come to swell the ranks. Altogether it was such a scene as the English Church in Bonn had never before witnessed, and well might the *Bonner Zeitung* devote, as it did, a whole column and a half of its limited space to a glowing description of this "*Englische Hochzeit*."

Precisely at eleven o'clock the bridesmaids (old schoolmates of Miss Martin, and including, of course, Sophy Warren) drove up to the door, where they formed in procession,

whilst Sir Peter, obscured by an enormous bouquet, and looking more like a state-coachman than a city magnate led his daughter up what by courtesy may be called the middle aisle. Lessing, ably supported by his groomsmen, was at the altar ready to receive the bride, and in another moment the fine sonorous voice of the much-respected chaplain at Bonn commenced the singularly plain-spoken exhortation with which the wedding-service begins.

As to the Bishop of British Polynesia, it was quite true he was there, but he kept himself in reserve for the actual words of union, and the subsequent blessing. This last he accomplished more successfully than the private one he had already attempted to bestow on Lessing. Indeed, encouraged thereto by the youth of both bride and bridegroom, and by what he fancied his own intimate acquaintance with the former, he ventured to lay a hand in an impressive manner on the head of either—a new ceremony, to which the young people themselves submitted with an excellent patience, but which caused a retired colonel in the distance, who had not

been seen in church for the last ten years, to exclaim, with what sounded very like an oath :

“Sheer Popery! It’s enough to drive any honest Protestant clean out of the church !”

Unfortunately the altar of this English chapel at Bonn is so obscured by a hideous reading-desk and pulpit that, under no circumstances, can a wedding be made to appear so perfect as it should be. But all those who caught a glimpse of the bride and bridegroom, as they left the church, united in asserting that the one was as charmingly pretty as the other was elegant and good-looking.

What need to tell of the breakfast?—how that the bishop proposed the health of the young couple in certain ponderous sentences that had rather the ring of Jeremy Taylor than of Anacreon?—how that Lessing returned thanks in a speech in which he spoke patronizingly of the bishop as a gentleman for whom he had a considerable respect, and who seemed very well suited to his work?—how even Miss Ross grew mellow for a mo-

ment under the influence of champagne, that cost her nothing?—how, in fact, the fun grew fast and, in Mr. Borrodale's direction, almost furious, until it became time for the bride and bridegroom to leave?

So they went on their way, girt with their own happiness, and prepared thenceforth for what of weal or woe the world might bring them.

To two other personages was that day also an eventful one.

To the good bishop it proved one of much trial. It was all very well to appear in lawn sleeves before such a congregation, and even to figure in the *Times* as having taken part in the ceremony. But it was this latter circumstance that brought about the calamity. As ill-luck would have it, the notice caught the eye of the gentleman who "did" the "slashing articles" for the *Daily Scalpel*, and, with a fierce vindictive joy, he swooped once more upon his episcopal quarry.

The style of the *Daily Scalpel* is too well known for a very long extract to be necessary. Let this suffice:

"At the present time, when so much stress

is laid on the necessity of increasing the home episcopate, it may not be amiss to suggest a method by which much additional help may be secured at a very slight increase in expense. It may not be generally known that there is already a large class of gentlemen in episcopal orders, whose services might easily be made available for home work. We allude to the so-called 'colonial bishops.' In the case of at least two-thirds of this body it has been found by experience that the duties of their respective dioceses either require no doing at all, or can best be done in the old country. In fact, these bishops belong already in all but name to the home-episcopate. Why not make them so in name also, and thus utilize that superabundant energy and self-denial of which they afford such conspicuous examples? It may seem invidious to particularize where all are so ripe for commendation: yet we cannot avoid referring in terms of unmingled admiration to the noble and disinterested prelate, who presides over a diocese almost co-extensive with the Pacific Ocean, and who has yet denied himself for

nearly six years the pleasure of a visit to the scene of his episcopate, in order that nothing should interrupt those home-labours, which experience has shown to be most conducive to the interests of his diocese. It is true his lordship is now at Bonn, but that apparently is in the discharge of one of the highest and holiest duties a bishop can perform, namely, the marrying of a member of those titled classes, of whom, as the epitaph reminds us, is 'the kingdom of heaven,' &c., &c.

The bishop had many friends, and none seemed to desert him at this juncture. With a truly remarkable unanimity, they all sent him copies of the paper in which this paragraph appeared, and most of them gave a yet stronger proof of their friendship, by underlining in divers-coloured inks the passages that in their judgment it behoved his lordship most carefully to study. It was really touching to see how, in this way at least, they all rallied round him.

"A moment—nay, one awful hour," the bishop was fairly at his wits' end with rage and

perplexity. It seemed as if he really must go out to his diocese at last, and leave the grand work of collecting postage stamps unfinished. He felt as some great artist who dies whilst his *chef-d'œuvre* is still incomplete. At this moment Miss Ross entered the room.

"Look here !" exclaimed the bishop, throwing her the paper, for he was too excited to be polite.

Miss Ross did look outside and inside, as if expecting to find some foreign substance. At last it occurred to her to glance over the columns. Her keen scent for slander soon directed her to the paragraph.

"Isn't it abominable and atrocious ?" asked his lordship.

"Disgusting !" replied Miss Ross.

"I've a great mind to prosecute the scamp for libel."

"I would if I were you, my lord. It is really necessary to make an example sometimes."

"But I suppose in any case I must go out to British Polynesia. One's motives in re-

maining are so horribly misrepresented, that I declare it's no longer any pleasure to do one's duty."

"Think of your health, my lord," suggested Miss Ross, cunningly. "That climate has never suited you."

"It isn't that," said the bishop, loftily. "I'm ready to lay down my life at any moment. But it seems so plainly my duty to stay in Europe until I have collected enough for my cathedral."

"No doubt of it, my lord," answered Miss Ross, who foresaw that, under these circumstances, his lordship's stay in Europe would be prolonged at least as long as his life.

"But I see how it is. I shall be driven out by those atrocious papers. There's no help for it; I must go."

"Why not give up the bishopric, my lord?" suggested Miss Ross, very gently and timidly.

"I can't, even if I wished to. I've nothing else to live on."

"I've saved ten thousand pounds," said

Miss Ross, with a show of touching magnanimity, "and it shall never be said that I allowed a cousin to be driven to a climate that I knew would kill him, because he had not the means to remain in Europe."

An intention, long since floating crudely in the bishop's mind, was ripened into action in a moment by these words.

"Miss Ross—Sarah, if I may call you so ; for, as you say, we are cousins—I have long been seeking an opportunity of talking seriously to you. You must yourself have observed that my former respect for you has of late deepened into a more personal—or rather, I should say, tender—feeling. To be brief, will you accept me for your husband?"

Thus were Miss Ross's plans triumphant ; thus did she secure for herself a place in the "honourable estate," and thus was an estimable prelate set free from the ingenious tortures of penny-a-lining inquisitors.

If, after matrimony, his lordship chanced to find that Miss Ross's ten thousand pounds included an unprecedented number of bad

debts, what then ? There was still enough to live on, and was not the Bishop of Dorchester expected soon to want help in his diocese ?

## CHAPTER XIII.

### NOW OR NEVER.

**B**EFORE he left Bonn, Arthur called, as in duty bound, at what had been Herr Bonngart's house. It was shut up, and Gretchen, who was left in charge, told him that the Frau and Fräulein had left home for change of air, as the former was very ill.

"And where are they gone?"

They were at Homburg staying with a doctor, who was either a relation or friend of the family—Gretchen did not know which. Neither could she remember their exact address—she was waiting to hear from them again.

"Then I may see them, but in any case, when they come back, don't forget to tell them I called," said Arthur, slipping a parting *douceur* into the dirty but honest hands of the girl.

This was immediately after the wedding-breakfast, and in another hour Arthur was on his way to Homburg, which he reached late the same night. Arrived at his hotel, he called at once for the Visitors'-List. The waiter brought it. Eagerly did Arthur scan the long roll of names. Frau Bonngart's was there, but Arthur did not notice it. He had eyes for but one. There it was :

“Lovell, Herbert, Kaufmann, New York, Schwedenpfad.”

This ascertained, Arthur went to bed, but not to sleep. His mind was far too excited at the prospect of to-morrow, too busy with the past, and too anxious for the future, to permit him even an hour's repose. The reference Mr. Lovell had made to Florence's illness had never been absent from his mind. He had got to think, however, that it was perhaps rather mental than physical, and that he (Arthur Lovell) might have had something to do with its origin.

The next morning he rose absurdly early, ordered a breakfast which he was unable to eat, and then strolled into the Kur-Haus to while away the time until it should not be

utterly outrageous to make a morning call. The play had not yet commenced, so Arthur tried hard to amuse himself with the papers. In vain. He could not remain still an instant. At last he started up and looked at his watch. It was now eleven. The little ball had just begun to rattle at the roulette-table, and the *croupiers* to commence their monotonous demon-chant, in which the winning of red or black was duly chronicled, but no mention was made of the human souls that were thus being lost. Crossing with eager steps the nearer portion of the Kur-Garten, Arthur found himself at the Schwedenpfad. The route and the number of the house he had already ascertained at his hotel, where he had also learnt that Miss Lovell was considered at the moment the belle of Homburg, whilst her father enjoyed the reputation of enormous wealth.

"But mademoiselle looks *triste*," added the communicative French waiter.

Arthur hoped in himself he might be the means of curing this *tristesse*, and his heart throbbed violently at the thought, as he stood before the door of the house that Mr.

Lovell had taken in its entirety for the Hom-burg season, and, by so doing, achieved his reputation as a *millionaire*.

"Is Mr. Lovell at home?" asked Arthur of the German footman who answered his ring.

Herr Lovell was at home. Would the gentleman walk up? It occurred to Arthur that the man ought to have inquired whether his master could receive a visitor. But he was not sorry that things had arranged themselves thus.

"What name, mein Herr, if you please?"

"Mr. Vaughan."

"Herr Forn," repeated the footman, throwing open a door, and revealing Mr. Lovell, ensconced in an arm-chair, and evidently deep in the politics of the *New York Tribune*. He started up at the announcement, but there was no appearance of cordiality in his welcome. Indeed he did not strive that there should be, for he said, with marked coldness—

"I am indebted to you, Mr. Vaughan, for remembering me after so very brief an acquaintance."

This almost amounted to a sneer, but Arthur answered, very quietly—

“You forget, Mr. Lovell, that my acquaintance with Miss Lovell was a good deal longer.”

This did not tend to improve the American's mood, but Arthur had deemed it desirable to remind him that the attachment he was about to avow for Florence was one founded on a close and lengthy intercourse. To this point he determined to come almost at once.

“May I ask how Miss Lovell is?” he inquired.

“Not very well, I am sorry to say—not well enough to receive visitors,” added Mr. Lovell, rather maliciously.

“I hope it is nothing serious.”

“Even if it is, sir,” answered Mr. Lovell, with unusual brusqueness, “I do not see that it need affect you very deeply.”

“Pardon me, Mr. Lovell. Nothing could possibly affect me more.”

“How so?” asked Mr. Lovell, with rising anger and astonishment.

“Because,” said Arthur, shutting his

mental eyes, and making the tremendous plunge—"because there is no one on earth for whom I have so much affection."

Mr. Lovell was for the moment paralyzed by the Englishman's audacity. Recovering himself somewhat, he exclaimed—

"I am at a loss, sir, to understand your meaning! You must be aware that this is a most extraordinary way in which to speak of a young lady."

"Pardon me. I am afraid I have not made my meaning sufficiently clear. In plain English, I have come here to-day to solicit the hand of your daughter."

"What right have you to make such a monstrous proposition?" exclaimed Mr. Lovell, rising, whilst the darkest of dark clouds gathered on his brow.

"You can hardly deny me the right to ask," answered Arthur, quietly, but also rising from his seat. "I love Miss Lovell passionately and devotedly, and this love gives me a right at least to endeavour to win her hand."

"I deny it altogether, sir. You had no right to love her, knowing, as you did, my

rooted aversion to Englishmen. You have spoken plainly ; you will perhaps forgive me if I do the same. Not only are you, on account of your nationality, the last person whom I should approve of as my daughter's husband, but there are other objections against you. I do not wish to hurt your feelings—though you have hurt mine more than perhaps you are aware—but I must be permitted to remind you, that neither in age, nor, I believe, in fortune, are you such a suitor as my daughter would naturally select."

"As respects age," answered Arthur, "I am thirty, and Miss Lovell, I believe, is nineteen. Eleven years, I grant, is a considerable difference, but not sufficient to render our union altogether unsuitable. As respects my fortune, that has increased very considerably since we met. It is now something more than forty thousand dollars a-year."

Mr. Lovell stared in astonishment. But the news did not make him waver in his resolution.

"I was wrong, then, about the fortune, but I repeat that, in other respects, you are

not such a suitor as my daughter would naturally select."

"I only seek permission to ask her the question. Should Miss Lovell endorse your view, I would never seek to ask it again."

"That's what I complain of most!" exclaimed Mr. Lovell, still more angrily. "It is just possible—I don't know—I haven't inquired—but I hope and believe not—that you have succeeded in putting some nonsense into my daughter's head. If so, you must have made a most unwarrantable use of your mutual intercourse at Bonn—an intercourse which, had I known there was an Englishman in Herr Bonngart's house, would never have had an opportunity of arising."

"Pardon me, Mr. Lovell. I wish to treat you with every respect, but the accusation you now bring against me is altogether unjust. I took no such advantage of my opportunities as you seem to suspect, and no avowal of my feelings ever passed my lips during our intercourse together. But I could not help loving her, and I would fain hope that the feeling was reciprocated."

"I take your word, sir, that it was so," answered Mr. Lovell, who was a gentleman at heart; "but this only tends to assure me that the affection on either side—if, indeed, it ever existed at all on the side of my daughter—can be of no very deep or durable nature."

"There, again, you wrong me, Mr. Lovell. On my side it is of the very deepest."

"It is useless to discuss the question further, Mr. Vaughan. The sooner our interview terminates, the better. Nothing that you can do or say will ever change the fact that you are an Englishman; and I tell you—nay, I swear to you—that there is only one Englishman in the whole world to whom I would ever consent to see my daughter married."

"I have no right to ask his name, but——"

"But I do not mind telling you. I have never seen him, know nothing about him, but that he is a distant relation and a truly noble-minded man. I mean, Sir Arthur Lovell."

"I hold you to your word!" cried Arthur vehemently. "I am he!"

Mr. Lovell stared at him in hopeless con-

fusion and surprise for several seconds. Then, as his mind rapidly revolved the past, a dim sense of the possibility of Arthur's statement being true came over him, and he said earnestly :

"You would not jest on such a subject. Do you really give me to understand that you are Sir Arthur Lovell?"

Arthur drew from his pocket-book a letter. It was the one Mr. Lovell had written when he had declined to accept the property.

"You see," said Arthur, smiling, "you gave me a sort of general invitation and I have taken you at your word."

The American, with the impulsiveness of his nation, seized the Englishman's hand and wrung it with violent emotion.

"Forgive me! Forgive me, Sir Arthur! I had no idea whom I was addressing, or I should have spoken very differently. You have my fullest permission to urge your suit. Whether it will be successful or not, I have no idea, but—and this is much for me to say—I hope so."

There was a little further talk and explanation, and then Mr. Lovell said :

"And now I will go and prepare Florence for your visit. But I shall not tell her its object. Perhaps you won't mind waiting here till I return. The poor child seems very weak and is easily upset. By-the-bye, how shall I announce you to her—as what you were, or what you are?"

"I hope to revive the past," answered Arthur. "Miss Lovell knows me only as Mr. Vaughan."

Mr. Lovell left the room, and in a few moments returned.

"Now," he said, "if you will come with me——"

With these aposiopestic words, he led the way to Florence's boudoir. He opened the door gently, and merely saying "Here, Flo, is Mr. Vaughan," disappeared again with instinctive delicacy.

Florence was seated in an arm-chair with her face towards the door. She rose languidly but with a smile of welcome as Arthur entered, and could not restrain a blush as he took her proffered hand.

"I am so glad to see you again, Mr. Vaughan," she said in her old, artless manner.

"It is nearly a year since we met last. I began to think you had quite forgotten us."

Arthur had seated himself at Florence's invitation, but he now rose. He felt his spirit burning too passionately within him to permit him to delay a moment the deed he was minded to do. He drew near her. He bent over her as she sate. She felt his breath hot on her brow—but she dared not look up. She guessed that a crisis was at hand. Her little heart fluttered within her like an imprisoned dove. Suddenly she became aware that one of her hands was seized in a firm, warm grasp, and at the same moment her ear caught the words, uttered in a rich, deep voice, now trembling with passionate emotion,

"Florence, I have loved you from the first moment that I saw you. Tell me, for God's sake, that you love me!"

She heard him, she understood him, but she could not speak or make an answering sign. She strove to rise but felt herself too weak. She longed to tell him by some little word or look that it was as he desired, but the flood-tide of her joy swept her will before

it. She could only sit there and tremble as she sate.

For one half-second Arthur doubted. The all-importance of the crisis alone made possible this weakness. Then, as the bonds of living sympathy, that had now so long united them, pulsated yet more passionately and seemed drawn the closer by the bodily nearness of the twain, he flung all doubt and prudence far away and, in the fervour of a hope fast ripening into certainty, he clasped her in his arms. He pressed his lips to hers again, again, again, in the reckless prodigality of love. Had she been strong enough to speak, she could not now have spoken.

But she felt no speech was needed. She lay there for a moment passive in his arms and welcomed the new-born joy as the parched earth the long-desired rain. Then overcome by the supreme fervour of her feelings she burst into a flood of tears.

There! it was out now!—out on both sides—that long-concealed, but deep, devoted love! No more of doubt and sorrow. Heart throbbed close to heart, lip clung to lip, eye looked fondly into eye. At last their souls

seemed mingled, as the currents of their future lives should flow together. Who should thenceforth separate them?—who should rob them of their joy? True to each other, as their very natures told them they would be, they might defy a banded world. Thenceforth they carried heaven within themselves!

At last they calmed themselves to talk. It had been evident to Florence, from her father's manner during his preliminary interview with her, that, in some mysterious way, a change had come over his feeling with respect to Arthur. He had, indeed, spoken of him with significant emphasis as his friend. But how this change had been brought about, Florence could not divine. She turned to Arthur for an explanation.

"Your father knows it all," answered the latter.

"Knows it all—before it happened too!" exclaimed Florence archly.

"Guessed it would happen, I should have said."

"And did nothing to prevent it? Pray explain."

"You remember I once told you I was not what I seemed. I was Arthur Lovell, not Arthur Vaughan, and I am now Sir Arthur Lovell, with a fortune large enough even for such an expensive little being as yourself."

"*You* Sir Arthur Lovell! What wonders you tell me. Then I can understand papa's consent, for he has been praising you to the skies. To tell you the truth I was getting a little tired of the Sir Arthur Lovell who appeared only on paper."

"I hope you will never get tired of the flesh and blood specimen." The mere idea of such a contingency in the future seemed to render it prudent for Arthur to indemnify himself in the present. This led necessarily to a momentary break in the conversation. When it was resumed, Florence asked:

"But what made you go about with a name that wasn't yours?"

"I had some sort of right to it," answered Arthur, smiling. "Vaughan was my mother's maiden name. However, I'll explain it all to you another time."

"Well, I'm glad you're still Arthur, at any rate, though you have altered what used to

go before and after it. I don't think I like 'Sir' so well as 'Mr.," added the young republican, pouting.

"You will never require to use either."

"I don't know that. When we quarrel, for instance."

"Then 'Sir' is much more impressive."

At this moment there was a knock at the door. It was Mr. Lovell, who was impatient to know the issue. By a natural impulse Arthur led Florence towards him and said,

"Mr. Lovell, your hope is realized."

The American was not much given to pious demonstrations. But he was greatly affected, and could not restrain himself from saying, in a voice tremulous with the deepest emotion:—

"A blessing rest upon you both!" Then he added, in a more natural tone—"To think that Herbert Lovell's daughter should, after all, marry an Englishman! I fancied the Fates themselves were against it."

"*Omen avertatur!*" muttered Arthur.

"Marriages are made in Heaven, you know, papa," answered Florence, gaily.

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“I hope yours will be made on earth, and that very soon, Flo.”

For an instant Arthur shuddered in the midst of his joy. He knew not why. Men say it is so when one treads upon your future grave. Had one so trodden upon his?

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE LAST OF THE LUCKLESS ONE.

WHAT need to describe the golden days that followed on the love long felt but late declared? And did such need exist, who were equal to the task? How can mere clumsy symbols like words express so infinite a fact? How should the concrete and temporal avail even dimly to shadow forth the abstract and eternal?

Let them rest in the unwritten annals of the world. Unwritten, yet unforgotten. For is not all that is true and beautiful in its inmost nature imperishable? A spark from Divinity itself, its real home is in the bosom of the Almighty. Well did two poets, differing widely in much else, agree in this when the one said that—

“A thing of beauty is a joy for ever,”

and the other that—

“The real remains to future ages fresh.” \*

And so were these days of untarnished love above all things true and beautiful. Alas! that they should have also been so few!

It was from no feeling of distrust, but from a natural curiosity to know all she could of Arthur, that Florence asked him to tell her the story of his life, and especially how he had come to get himself entangled with one he could not love.

All this did Arthur now relate to Florence, and added to it the sequel of Miss Claxton's history. And, at the end, Florence, so far from chiding him for his fickleness, could marvel only at the keenness of his sense of honour, and at the length and severity of the trial to which he had exposed his life. So truly did the two souls understand each other.

Days passed in joyous intercourse, and yet, all the while, there lay upon Arthur's spirits a heavy weight. He could not but see more and

“*Das Aechte bleibt der Nachwelt unverloren.*”—Göthe.

more plainly that Florence was not well. She tried to be as sprightly as of old, but it was evident that to be so now required an effort. The spirit was still willing, but the flesh seemed growing weak.

On this matter Arthur took counsel with Mr. Lovell.

"It's nothing, I hope," said the latter. "It is true our family is consumptive, and, as I told you once before, I am not free from a tendency to consumption myself. But I consulted all the best doctors at Mentone, and they agreed in saying, that Florence's lungs, though weak, are sound."

"But how did they account then for this lassitude?"

"One shrewd French fellow told me he thought it was something on the mind, and hinted at some unfortunate attachment. If so, it ought soon to get better now."

"Did you come here for her sake?"

"Partly for hers, partly for my own. I knew my digestion was a little out of order, and I guessed it might be the same with hers. You know everything may be traced more or less directly to the stomach."

"Or, with so vague a formula,—to the moon!"

"Besides," continued Mr. Lovell, "I thought the life and gaiety here would do her good. She used to be so fond of anything of that sort. But now she seems to shrink from it—I can't imagine why."

"It is—it must be—because she is more unwell than you think. Has she had a doctor here?"

"No; the one at Mentone told us what water to drink."

"Let me send for Dr. Koch—he is said to be the cleverest."

"I will send for him to-morrow. But," added Mr. Lovell, smiling, "you are suffering, I am sure, from the over-anxiety of a lover."

"I hope so—I hope so," said Arthur gloomily, "but it is surely well to be upon the safe side."

The next day Dr. Koch came, and carefully examined the young patient. With the usual professional smile, he told her she would soon be better. He then returned to speak with Mr. Lovell in private.

"Has Miss Lovell ever received any injury to her back?" he asked, after a few preliminary observations.

Mr. Lovell turned pale.

"You don't mean to say," he asked hastily, "that you perceive any indication of such an accident?"

"I am afraid so—it almost seems as though the spine were affected."

"Not seriously—for Heaven's sake tell me, not seriously."

"I cannot yet speak positively as to that," answered the doctor gravely.

Mr. Lovell sank back into a chair, overpowered by his emotions. Seeing this, the cautious doctor forebore to tell him what he would otherwise have mentioned, namely, that Miss Lovell had received some internal injury as well. On the contrary, he endeavoured to cheer him.

"Do not distress yourself about it, Mr. Lovell. I daresay it will all come right. But I should like to know if I am correct in suspecting that she has had a fall?"

"About this time last year she had one," answered Mr. Lovell, who remembered now

that, in spite of the fact that Florence seemed no worse for it at the time, her health had very soon after seemed to droop and languish. And he gave an account of the occurrence.

“Ah! that explains it all. Well, Mr. Lovell, I will write a prescription and call and see the young lady again very soon.”

So saying, Dr. Koch, who, from long practice amongst the English, spoke their language almost as well as his own, went his way, bearing a very solemn secret with him. But he did not keep it a secret from his wife and two distant cousins—mother and daughter—who were staying in his house. He little suspected how deeply one of them was interested in the news.

That same evening Arthur was sitting in his room—he had moved into lodgings in the Promenade to be nearer Florence—when the servant announced that a lady wished to see him. He fancied it might be Aunt Letty thus raised to brevet-rank by the liberal politeness of his attendant. He and she were now on the best of terms—the forty thousand dollars a year had made a wonderful difference in the worthy nurse’s opinion of him. At

any rate, as he knew no ladies in Homburg, he came to the conclusion that the visitor must have some connection with Florence. He therefore gave directions that she should be shown up, though rather surprised and also a little alarmed at the lateness of the visit.

During the few moments that intervened before the lady made her appearance, Arthur sank back into the train of meditation in which he had been lost when the interruption came. He had been thinking gloomily of the obvious change for the worse in Florence's health. Mr. Lovell, who was naturally hopeful, had told him the doctor's opinion that all would come right. But though the former had by this time persuaded himself that there was nothing to fear, he had not been so successful with Arthur. The latter could not but notice that, in spite of what doctors might say, his loved one grew weaker and more wasted every day.

He looked up. A lady stood at the door. No name was announced, and her veil was down so that he could not scan her features ; but he noticed that she was clad in deep mourning and had a tall, commanding figure.

She advanced with a firm step into the room.

"Forgive me for disturbing you so late," she said, "but I have taken the liberty of an old acquaintance."

The voice was hollow and sepulchral, yet it sounded strangely familiar to Arthur's ears. In another second the lady threw back her veil and revealed the features of Louise Bonngart.

Arthur started with astonishment. Absorbed in Florence, he had forgotten that his former teacher was also at Homburg. And to visit him thus alone at night—it was passing singular! However, he tried to repress his surprise and, extending his hand, said in a cordial tone—

"Say, rather, friend, Miss Bonngart. I am delighted to have the pleasure of seeing you again. I——"

Arthur stopped. Louise had not taken his hand. But now she suddenly seized it and pressed it, with a rapid motion, to her lips. Ere he himself could withdraw it, she had again flung it hastily aside.

Arthur was amazed and annoyed. He

knew not what to make of such conduct. Was Louise mad ? For the moment he almost thought so, and glanced again into her face. He was struck by its deadly paleness. Her eye, too, which was fixed serpent-like upon him, glittered with more than mortal brightness. And the features, how shockingly altered since he had seen her last ! Then they were still fresh and youthful. Now they were hollow, wasted, sunken, old. It was still Louise, but at the moment it seemed like the Louise of the grave.

A strange, chilly feeling crept over Arthur. In spite of his manhood a sense of mysterious awe fastened upon his vitals as he found himself thus standing alone, by night, face to face with that dark, death-like figure. But he made an effort, and, dissembling both his annoyance and his dread, he said—

“Will you not be seated, Miss Bonngart ?”

“I prefer to stand. I have come to tell you something, and then I go for ever.”

Arthur was appalled at the ghastly hollowness of the tone. It seemed a voice from the sepulchre of the soul.

“What is it ?” he asked, at length, with

a dim presentiment that it must needs be something awful.

"You are engaged to Florence Lovell?"

"That is no news," answered Arthur, faintly endeavouring to smile away the painfulness of his emotion. "What then?"

"You will never marry her!"

"I shall! I will!" cried Arthur, fiercely, mad to find his own forebodings thus sanctioned by another.

"I tell you, no!" And a dim, ghastly smile flitted over the lips of Louise, like a corpse-light over a grave.

"Good God! What do you mean? Explain—for heaven's sake, explain!"

The pale glitter deepened in the eyes of Louise as she answered—

"Certainly. I will explain. I am staying with Florence's doctor——"

"Doctor Koch?"

"Yes."

"Go on! go on! What about him?"

"Only that he told us this evening that Florence's case was hopeless—quite hopeless," repeated Louise, with diabolic calmness.

"O God!" cried Arthur, with an exceeding

bitter cry. A deadly pallor overspread his features. A faintness came over him. He could no longer stand, but sank back into his chair and gasped for breath. His eyes were open, but for the moment they saw nothing. His lips moved, but no word escaped that ashy portal.

It was an awful moment. The bolt of the dimly-dreaded Fate had struck his soul to the earth. Happiness, hope, life itself, all seemed murdered in an instant. He would have wept no unmanly tears, but that the fearful tension at his heart kept his feelings bound in iron.

At last he raised his head. Louise still stood before him with that cold demon-smile upon her lips. The sight of her restored him for a moment.

"It is not true!" he cried, wildly. "It is not true! You dare not say it is! You have come to torture me—I know not why—and so you tell me this."

"It is true," said Louise, with pitiless precision. "It is true and you know it. But I have yet more to tell you."

"Say what you will. I care not for aught

else. Oh, God in heaven, what agony is this!"

He bent his head and buried his face in his hands. As he thus sate, sunk in the ocean of his grief, Louise approached and poured word by word like drops of venom into his ear—

"It is I who have killed her! Ha! ha! You have to thank me for that! It was I who caused her fall on the Venusberg. I did it on purpose. It was only to open my hand at the right moment—that was all."

"Woman! Fiend!" cried Arthur, starting up and seizing her by the wrist with fearful violence. "It is you who have done this? You who have tried to kill the dearest, noblest, sweetest of God's creatures? Then may His curse for ever rest upon you!"

"It does already," answered Louise, still almost unmoved, and making no attempt to release her hand. "I am now as much beyond curses as I am beyond love."

"Begone!" cried Arthur, loosing his hold. "Out of my sight! Yet stay. Had you—could you have—any reason for this fiendish cruelty?"

"And you, Arthur Vaughan—or Arthur

Lovell—dare to ask me that!" answered Louise, at last mounting into passion herself—"you, who with your own lips told me that you loved me, and then forsook me for another! But I swore to have my revenge, and I have had it."

"Woman, you rave! Your story is all madness. God grant your prediction prove so also!"

"It is not madness—it is fact. There was a time when I would have died sooner than remind you of it, but now all that is changed. My crimes have unsexed me, and I need shrink from nothing."

"I never told you that I loved you."

"You did—I swear you did!—in the little study, before I went to Würzburg."

Even in his present agitation the scene came back to Arthur's mind. What she said was literally true. He had indeed spoken the words, little thinking they would be so terribly misunderstood. And he remembered, too, how strange he had at the time considered the manner of Louise. This, then, was the key to the awful mystery of her conduct.

"You will say next you did not write these

lines," hissed Louise between her clenched teeth, as she dashed down on the table before him the verses she had picked up in the passage, after that fateful interview. "Look!"

Mechanically, and obeying the horrible fascination under which he laboured in the presence of the murderess, Arthur glanced at the lines. They were indeed his own, and headed, "To Louise." In an instant the whole truth flashed upon him, and, innocent as he was, he felt abashed and overcome by the appalling sternness of the Fate in whose hands he had been so sovereign an instrument.

"God forgive me," he said at last, faintly, "if I misled you! I never meant to do so. These lines were addressed to another."

"Curses on you for the word! My last, last hope is gone! I thought till now that, though I was loved no longer, yet at least you had loved me once. Is it, then, only for this I have got the damning guilt of two murders on my conscience? Oh, God! Oh, God!"

"Two murders!—Whose? Speak!"

"It was for you—for your sake—to get

back to you to remind you by my presence of your plighted love—that I did the first. I poisoned my aunt—my poor old aunt—who left me all her money.”

Arthur gazed at her as he might have gazed upon a fiend. But he was powerless to speak. Louise continued—

“Then I returned, and found you faithless, so I watched for my revenge. The chance came at last, and you know now how I availed myself of it. Remember, it was all for your sake—your sake. You have made me what I am !”

Arthur sat horribly fascinated by the wildness of her manner. He longed to rid himself of her, but he could no more tell her to begone. His tongue refused its office.

“I am going,” she went on—“going—going to the grave—to hell !—it is all one to me. I am no longer a woman—I feel it. I have given my money to a convent. Perhaps I shall turn nun, and count beads, and say long prayers, but I know the devil will have me, for all that. There is only one thing that comforts me, and you know what that is. You will never marry Florence Lovell ! Ha !

ha ! She will die before me, and I have done it—I—yes, I—whom you said you loved, but didn't. You can have me executed. Pray do. I should not die then before Florence, and you will never marry her. Ha ! ha !”

She turned—she strode towards the door. On the threshold she looked back once more, and, with a ghastly grin of exultation, again repeated, as she raised her long, lean forefinger—

“Ha ! ha ! I have done it.”

Arthur heard the diabolic laughter echoing through passage and hall, until the front door was shut with a hollow bang, and he felt himself at last alone with his agony of grief.

What he had heard seemed a horrible dream, yet he felt sure—sure from his own presentiments—that it was too true. For hours and hours he sate, with his elbows on the table, and his aching temple resting on one hand, until at last, as the grey morning stole in upon his thoughts, he started wildly up and cried—

“She shall yet be mine !”

As he stood there, haggard and wan, after

that long, awful night of suffering, he cast a chance look at the mirror opposite which he found himself. Strange! What was that white patch by his temple? He looked more closely. There, where his head had rested on his hand during those hours of anguish, the hair was now become white as new-fallen snow.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE REAL BEGINNING.

IT was indeed true what Louise had said, and the sweet young earthly life of Florence Lovell was drawing rapidly to its close. As yet she herself knew not of her danger, although her sense of daily increasing weakness caused dim forebodings to take possession of her mind. But the young ever cling to life, especially when, as in her case, that life is aglow with all that constitutes true happiness.

Arthur had lost no time in putting the plainest questions to Dr. Koch. He put them not as having received any information that had aroused his fears, but as himself suspecting the worst. And, when the doctor

saw that he was thus, as it were, prepared for the communication, he no longer hesitated to tell him plainly that there was cause for the gravest alarm. Beyond this he did not go, but Arthur knew very well what it meant. It was the professionally euphemistic way of expressing the fact that the case was hopeless.

An internal lesion had developed into a disease that was rapidly consuming the poor girl's vital strength. This, too, was complicated by the injury to the spine, though the latter would not in itself have been fatal.

When the sad news was communicated to Mr. Lovell, his grief was only less intense than that of Arthur. But it took him long to believe it. He telegraphed to Paris for one of the first doctors of the day. But when he, too, said that there was nothing to be done, then even Mr. Lovell's faith gave way, and the strong man lost all his fortitude.

And now the question arose, should Florence be told of her danger? The doctor, as usual, said, no. He had a great idea of keep-

ing things as comfortable as they could be to the last. But Arthur thought, and Mr. Lovell agreed with him, that it was a duty to her they both loved most upon earth, to give her some intimation of the now inevitable future ; only it must not be done abruptly. They must watch for an opportunity.

Meanwhile Arthur was constantly with Florence. The thought that he must so soon be parted from her, lent a fresh and mysterious value to the hours that yet remained, and Florence herself, in spite of her illness, which only at times was painful, felt the purest and highest happiness that is possible on earth.

The opportunity came ere long. Florence was, as usual, sitting in an easy chair in her boudoir with Arthur at her side. She felt her own weakness more than ever that day. She leaned her head back in the chair, and closed her eyes. Do what she would, a dark presentiment forced itself in upon her. In virtue of the perfect sympathy that existed between them, the same thought was at the same moment in the mind of each, but it was Florence, not Arthur, who first shaped it into words :

"I want to say something to you, Arthur," she murmured in her sweet low voice; "but I would not for worlds distress you."

Arthur knew instinctively what was coming, and was thankful, even whilst his lip quivered with an overpowering access of grief.

"Tell me what it is, my dearest. It is better thus, than to brood over it alone yourself."

"You do not know how weak, how helpless I feel; so different to what I was at Bonn!"

Arthur bent over her and kissed her. He could not at the moment trust himself to speak.

"And, dear Arthur—do not mind my saying so—I feel sometimes as though I should not live much longer."

Again Arthur kissed that pure, pale forehead, and all his heart was melted in the contact. When he could curb his quivering lips sufficiently to frame an answer, he replied:

"My sweetest, dearest love, we are all in the hands of God."

He felt he must weep. But Florence had opened her great, dreamy eyes — now dreamier and more full of meaning than ever—and was looking at him. For her sake he controlled himself, and strove hard to maintain a tolerably calm exterior. It may be she had expected a somewhat different answer, for she asked :

“And do you too think so, Arthur?”

“My dearest, who knows what God may deem the best for us? Let us believe above all things in his love.”

This he said, as not yet daring to express himself more plainly. But Florence looked more closely at him, and then said with sudden energy :

“Do not be afraid. Tell me the worst. I can bear it.”

Arthur fixed his eyes upon her, and was struck by the more than mortal expression of her countenance. The whole face, always so delicate and refined, was now transfigured with a yet keener spirituality, the eyes seemed to burn with sacred fire, whilst the silky hair, still unimpaired by illness, set her saint-like head in a golden nimbus. She looked herself

a saint—purified, etherealized, sublimed above all earthly grossness.

Arthur saw that she was right—that, in spite of fleshly weakness, she could bear the news he had been seeking to convey. Placing his arm around her slender, and now wasted, form, as if he would thus give of his manhood to strengthen her yet more, he said in a voice that went straight from heart to heart :

“My dearest, the doctor does indeed say your case is a serious one.”

“I understand,” answered Florence, with a faint, melancholy smile, whilst the pallor deepened for a moment on her cheek. “I understand. My life is over, my sweet and happy life. I thought as much. God gave me the presentiment, that I might bear the fact the better. Ah ! Arthur, it is hard—a little hard—to die so young, but I do not care for that. But to part from you—to sever this true and precious bond that unites us—how shall I bear the trial ?”

“Oh, Florence ! Florence ! this goes to break my heart,” and, despite his fortitude, Arthur sobbed convulsively. He had nerved

himself to tell her the fatal news, but, this done, his feelings overpowered his self-command. It was now Florence who was the calmer of the twain.

"Arthur!" she said, "dearest Arthur!" and she laid her little hand caressingly on his head.

But Arthur still shook with an earthquake throe of passionate emotion. To lose her for ever, so young, so fair, so good! The sharp thought went to divide the very joints and marrow of his tender soul; and Florence wist not how to comfort him. She could only lavish on him her sweet, innocent caresses, and call him softly by his name.

All at once Arthur started up. A slumbering idea had awaked within him.

"Florence!" he cried impatiently, "come death or life, you will still be mine! Ours is not a love that death can kill."

Florence gazed at him, scarce comprehending what he said.

"True love," continued Arthur, "such as yours and mine, my sweetest, is immortal and eternal. If it please God to separate us now, we shall be united again hereafter."

"I know it! I feel it!" exclaimed Florence, "and then we shall be happy for ever."

"Ours is the love of the soul," continued Arthur, "and the body counts for little. How gladly," he added, "would I shuffle off the cumbrous coil and go with you, were it only lawful!"

"Nay, Arthur, speak not so. Enjoy life while you can."

"Enjoy life, and without you! Ah, Flo, you know full well how impossible that is!"

"Then bear it patiently, my dearest, and think that I am ever near you. You know I shall be, if it be possible."

"It is! it must be!" cried Arthur, vehemently. "But, Flo, another thing. Do not be startled. I want to have every right before heaven and earth to call you mine. Why should we not yet be married?"

For one moment Florence looked surprised. Then, with her sweet force of sympathy, she entered into the full meaning of the idea. Removed, as their marriage now must be, from all worldly considerations, it would be

the solemn religious sanction of a great spiritual union. It seemed fitting that such should take place. If it was out of the ordinary routine of life, was not their love a love surpassing that of others? Then, too, it would be a comfort to Arthur in this world, and perchance also to herself in the next.

"You are right, Arthur," she answered, softly.

Another as unselfish as Florence, but with a less keen spiritual insight, might have dissuaded Arthur from thus binding himself, even though the tie in its legal aspect must needs be so soon dissolved. But Florence knew full well that Arthur, like herself, held it for sacrilege to say that true love could be repeated or transferred. It was a something of which the soul was capable but once, and which must for ever last. She knew then that Arthur would never marry again. It was not in his nature, any more than in hers, to wish to do so. This light transference of affection was profanation even in the thought.

Thus it was out of purest and most unself-

fish love that Florence fell in at once with the proposition, and Arthur kissed her and thanked her, and it seemed for the moment as if some great load had been removed from the heart of each.

Mr. Lovell, though startled, made no objection. Indeed, he saw none, but, even had he been otherwise minded, the slightest wish of his dying daughter was now to him a law. It was his sole remaining pleasure to study to forestall her wants.

Two days later the marriage took place in Florence's boudoir. In the interval she had grown much weaker, and it was evident to all that what men profanely call "the end," but what is really more akin to the beginning, could not be far distant.

A clergyman—a college friend of Arthur—who happened to be staying at Homburg, had undertaken to perform the ceremony. Only Mr. Lovell and Aunt Letty were present as witnesses.

The service followed was that of the Church of England, as both Arthur and Florence were Episcopalians. The latter was too weak to stand or kneel, but she sate,

dressed in a pure white robe without ornament of any kind, in the great arm-chair, which now looked greater and greater every day as its occupant grew more and more wasted.

In consequence of Florence's state only the essentials of the service were read, and then the clergyman pronounced a blessing.

"I do not know if the union be complete in the sight of man," said he, "but it is in the sight of God."

"And those thus joined together even death cannot put asunder!" added Arthur solemnly.

That very day a change for the worse came over Florence. But her mind and that of Arthur were now wonderfully calmer, and they both seemed almost reconciled to the thought of her approaching dissolution. In these last few days, they had grown firmly to believe that death with them would not prove a separation—that her spirit would ever hover near his, and their souls still vibrate with the same emotions. That which was of the earth, earthy, must needs perish with the earth, but that which was of the spirit—

and their love was such—would live and flourish to all eternity.

About ten o'clock that evening the clergyman was again summoned to administer the last sacrament. He found Florence in bed, and the doctor told him she probably would not live out the night. She received the sacred emblems, and then lay back a little while exhausted.

Arthur had left her only at rare intervals during the day, and he now sate by her bedside, watching her with tender, tearful eyes. Aunt Letty was in the next room overcome with grief, whilst Mr. Lovell was for the moment in the drawing-room with the doctor.

Suddenly Florence opened her eyes, and saw those of Arthur fixed upon her. She put out her thin, but still beautiful little hand, and laid it lovingly upon his.

"Arthur," she said faintly, "try not to be unhappy."

"It is hard—very hard—dearest, to be so patient as you."

"Remember it is no separation, after all. I feel I shall always be near you. I think,"

she added, whilst a seraphic glow became visible in her eye, as if kindled by the nearer contemplation of some scene of surpassing beauty, "I think I can promise you this. I am going to God, and God is Love. He will, I am sure, grant us our desire."

"I believe it," said Arthur, solemnly. "And may He bless you, my sweetest, dearest, only love, with all His blessings. To His care I commit you."

"And, Arthur," continued Florence, after a pause, during which her breath seemed failing, "I feel I shall be going very soon now. I will wish everyone 'good-bye,' and then I shall ask to be left alone with you. Will you call Aunt Letty, dearest?"

Arthur did so, and the dying girl took a touching farewell of her old nurse. Then Mr. Lovell came in, and a yet more painful interview followed.

"And now, papa," she added, "you know how I have loved you, and how I always shall love you. We shall soon meet again. But just for these last few moments I should like to be left alone with Arthur. He is now my husband."

Convulsed with heart-rending grief, Mr. Lovell left the room, and Arthur remained alone with Florence.

"I shall want nothing more," said the latter with difficulty. "Thank God, I am in no pain, and my head is clear, and I can still see you, my own dear Arthur."

"God bless you, sweetest," was all Arthur could reply.

There was another pause, and then Florence murmured—

"It is getting dark—where are you?"

"Here at your side, my loved one, praying to God for you."

"Press my hand a little tighter. I want to feel you, now I cannot see you. And, Arthur—when you see me dying—kiss me—kiss me on my forehead, where you kissed me the first time—you remember—when I had my fall."

Again she rallied for a moment, as those who die young so often do.

"How sweet that kiss was!" she said. "You thought I never felt it. But, thank God, I did. It was that on which I lived during your long, long absence. And, Arthur

—dear Arthur—under my pillow, you will find something when I am gone. It is for you. You will value it, I know, but while I am alive I cannot part with it even to you.”

She sank back, exhausted, into silence. Arthur could only press her hand and murmur,

“God bless you, darling Flo!”

A few minutes passed and then Arthur could not but notice that a marked change was passing over Florence.

“I am now very near to God,” she said, “but I am not afraid.”

“He will protect you, my beloved.”

And then, an instant later, she added,

“Remember I am yours for ever! I will not say ‘farewell.’”

Her breathing grew fainter and fainter. At last, when it had almost ceased, and Arthur was already bending over her to fulfil her wish, she said, in a strange, whispered voice, which seemed like an echo from some distant and mysterious country :

“Now the kiss!”

At these words, with tear-blind eyes and quivering lips, did Arthur do her bidding.

She felt the contact and Arthur, through his tears, saw that she smiled—a smile as of contentment, pure and placid—a smile, that spoke of love as her last message to the earth she left.

Thus passed Florence Lovell from the trammels of the flesh to the freer world of spirit !

\* \* \* \* \*

A little golden box was found beneath her pillow, which she had always worn as a locket next her heart. It contained a tiny, faded woodland flower, torn once as it seemed asunder, but now carefully rejoined with the finest golden wire. It was the one which Arthur had plucked on the Venusberg, as emblematic of divided lives, and which Florence had picked up and preserved. Round it was wrapped a piece of paper with a few lines in her delicate handwriting. They ran thus :

“ You said the flow’ret must remain  
For ever parted into twain :—  
Not so ! A golden thread can bind  
The petals that were rent apart,  
And so Love’s chain, with Hope entwin’d,  
Can draw together heart and heart.”

Alas ! how little had Florence thought, as she wrote these lines, that, as regarded any external, visible union, the stern shears of Atropos were strong to divide even the tenacious links of Love !

\* \* \* \* \*

Sir Arthur Lovell yet lives, and has spared neither himself nor his wealth in works of charity and philanthropy. His great sorrow has not hardened his heart or made him a mere cumberer of the ground. But, if you should chance to meet him, you could hardly fail to notice that, though still *on* the earth, he is *of* the earth no longer. There is a strange speculative light in his eyes, which tells you at once that his soul is far away in some region little known to ordinary men. And who shall dare to say that what he has confided to a few sympathizing friends is not true ? Who shall dare to deny that he often, as he says, feels the sweet presence of his departed wife—that, as he sits lonely in his study, he knows that she is near him—that she whispers sweet words of hope and

patience in his ear—that, ever and anon, he is sensible of a soft, pure kiss impressed upon his brow? Who shall say that these things are impossible?

Certainly not he who has compiled this record.

THE END.







